HAROLD B. LEE LIBRARY
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY
PROVO, UTAH

LIBRARY
Brigham Young University

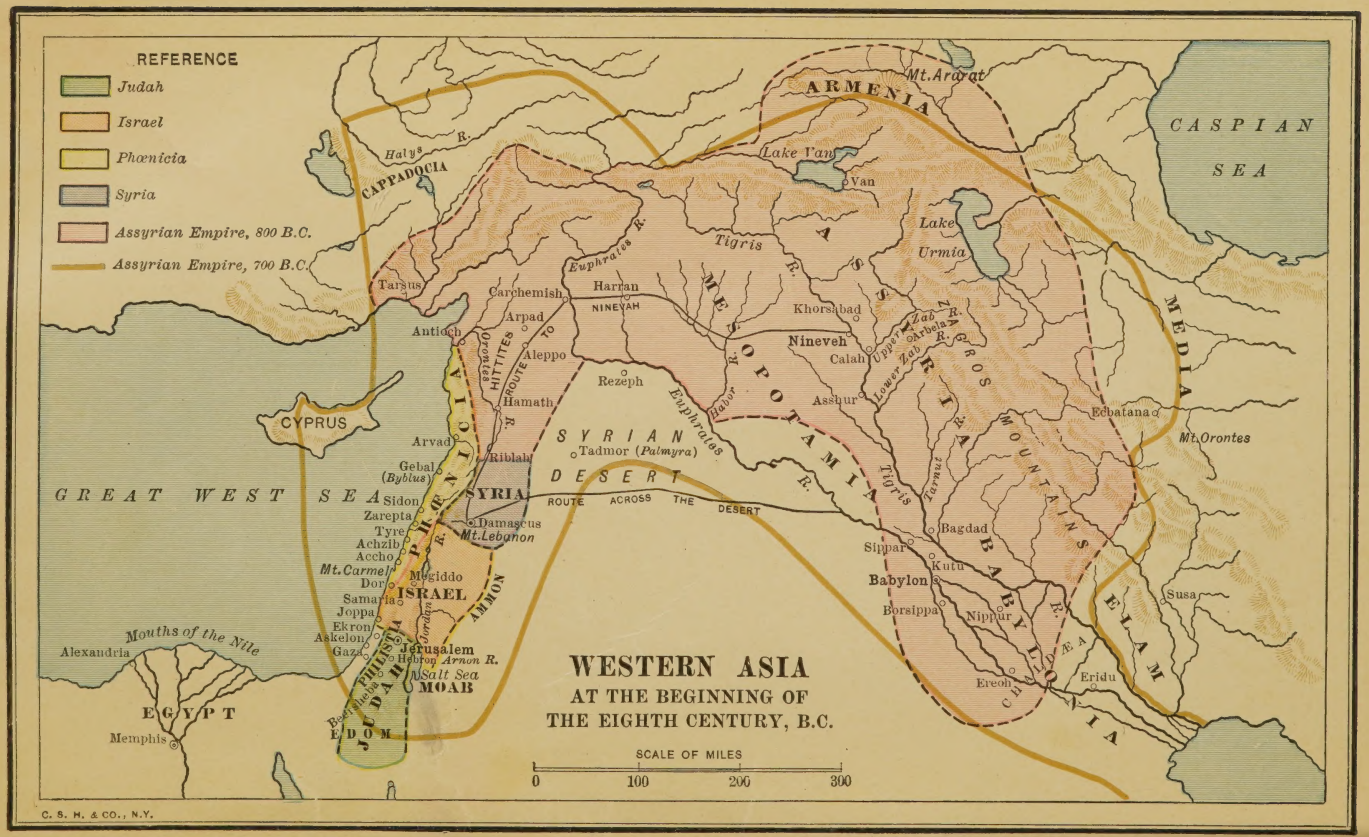
GIFT OF

JOSEPH SMITH FISH

10/87

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
Brigham Young University

https://archive.org/details/landleadersofisr00dalb


REFERENCE
Judah
Israel
Phœnicia
Syria
Assyrian Empire, 800 B.C.
Assyrian Empire, 700 B.C.
WESTERN ASIA
AT THE BEGINNING OF
THE EIGHTH CENTURY, B.C.
SCALE OF MILES
0
100
200
300
CASPIAN SEA
ARMENIA
Mt. Ararat
Lake Van
Van
Lake Urmia
CAPPADOCIA
Halys R.
Tarsus
Antioch
CYPRUS
GREAT WEST SEA
Arvad
Gebal (Byblus)
Sidon
Zarepta
Tyre
Achzib
Accho
Mt. Carmel
Dor
Samaria
Joppa
Ekron
Askelon
Gaza
Alexandria
Mouths of the Nile
EGYPT
Memphis
PHŒNICIA
ISRAEL
JUDAH
EDOM
Jerusalem
Hebron
Arnon R.
Salt Sea
MOAB
AMMON
Jordan R.
Carchemish
Arpad
Aleppo
Riblah
Hamath
HITTITES
ROUTE TO
Harran
NINEVAH
Euphrates R.
Tigris R.
Rezeph
SYRIAN DESERT
Tadmor (Palmyra)
SYRIA
ROUTE ACROSS THE DESERT
Damascus
Mt. Lebanon
Khorsabad
Nineveh
Calah
Upper Zab R.
Lower Zab R.
Arbela
Asshur
Habor R.
MESOPOTAMIA
ASSYRIA
ZAGROS MOUNTAINS
Tigris R.
Tarnut R.
Sippar
Kutu
Babylon
Borsippa
Nippur
Ereck
Eridu
BABYLONIA
Bagdad
Ecbatana
MEDIA
Mt. Orontes
Susa
ELAM

C. S. H. & CO., N.Y.

BX
8621.17
.D15l

# Land and Leaders *of* Israel

## *Lessons in the Old Testament*

By
EZRA C. DALBY, M. A.
*Instructor in Religious Education*
*L. D. S. College*
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

153153

"Ideals are often poor ghosts; but sometimes they are made flesh; they breathe upon us with warm breath, they touch us with soft responsive hands, they look on us with sad sincere eyes, and speak to us in appealing tones; then their presence is a power, when they shake us like a passion, and we draw after them with gentle compulsion, as flame is drawn to flame."

Published by the
DESERET BOOK COMPANY
Salt Lake City, Utah
for the
Department of Education

Copyrighted by Heber J. Grant
for the Department of Education of the
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Printed in U. S. A. by
Deseret News Press

THE LIBRARY
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY
PROVO, UTAH

## INTRODUCTORY PREFACE

Dr. George H. Betts has most forcefully said, "One of our greatest needs is to make our religious education religious." He was keenly conscious of the fact that we may acquaint ourselves with all the historical data and be able to use in argument all the facts and information concerning the Bible without ever experiencing the spirit of worship or feeling the thrill and throb of a great religious experience. John Ruskin once said, "Education does not mean teaching people what they do not know; it means teaching them to behave as they do not behave." This is especially true in the field of religious education. All close students of our work readily admit that one of our greatest needs in this field is the spirit of worship and the desire to discover in the lives of great men and women that God has been pleased to honor such elements as will contribute to the enrichment and sanctification of our own lives.

In the production of this book three objectives have been kept consistently in mind:

1. To invite a spirit of worship and a desire to emulate the noble qualities of the great characters of the Bible, rather than to be looking for their weaknesses, as expressed in the prayer provided in each lesson.

2. To avoid all controversial questions as to the authenticity and historicity of the incidents and biographies of the Bible. Little good can result from a discussion at this point in our religious education of the problems raised by higher critics concerning this sacred volume.

3. To deal with the characters and incidents of the Bible in such a sympathetic and intimate way as to give

the students a new incentive for reading it; to develop a more intimate acquaintance with the historical and social backgrounds, that the Bible may have a new meaning and message for our youth.

If these objectives are kept clearly and constantly in mind by the teacher, this book will be found a distinct contribution in the field of religious education.

GUY C. WILSON.

## DEDICATION

TO the memory of my sainted mother, who first inspired in my heart a love and reverence for the men and women of God depicted in these pages, and who embodied in her own life and person a faith and loyalty to God that makes her worthy to be numbered among them.

## FOREWORD

Plato taught that children and young people could not comprehend the truth in its abstract purity, but must receive it through the forms of art. He therefore urged the right selection of the best poems, songs, pictures, etc., which were true and pure as well as beautiful, so that through them the pupils might get the first sense of the truth necessary for their lives. Other educators in Greece added to this the imitation of human models of virtue and right conduct as important in moral and religious training. To this we may add that no people ever excelled the Greeks in accomplishing their objective in moral and religious education. They got results.

The author's experience corroborates the contention of the Greeks. Abstract virtues are intangible things, cold, dead propositions that make no appeal to young people until they are embodied in persons whom they admire. The law of the ancient Hebrews contained the first great commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," and also the second, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." But until Jesus came to manifest in his own person the true meaning of love, both for the Father, and his neighbor, it was a dead letter. No one understood it, and no one lived it.

So must all ideals be "made flesh and dwell among us," before they really grip our lives and influence our conduct. In other words, they must become incarnate and live with us as human companions whom we love and admire, if we are to be molded into their likeness. Virtue disassociated from human personality really has no existence. Religious ideals are taken by con-

tagion rather than by requirement, by suggestion rather than by admonition. It is "caught, not taught." The heart is never reached by commandment, and only when the heart is touched will the pupil become enthusiastic for righteousness.

The religious lessons in this book cluster around individuals, in most of whom are incarnated the religious principle that the pupils should acquire. These men and women are the well-known characters of the Bible, perhaps the best examples of faith in God that could be found. Associated with each lesson is song, prayer, scripture reading, and a concert prayer in which is embodied the main thought of the lesson. These combined exercises constitute worship. At the end of the lesson is a verse of poetry in harmony with Plato's suggestion, and generally related to the lesson.

Some of the teachers may feel that this plan of providing for worship will take too much time. They want to get to the facts of the lesson as soon as possible, but really the center of religion is worship. It is the heart of the whole matter. Go over the history of religion and you will find that where people have been persecuted for their faith, they have been willing to give up everything else if they had to, but they have clung to their worship, even if they had to go to the catacombs to conduct their services. The atmosphere that worship creates will more than compensate for the time consumed.

These lessons practically cover the whole field of moral and religious education. The combined characters of these men and women represent every virtue and religious principle that need to be taught in a course of this kind. They incarnate the highest ideals that the Hebrews attained. These ideals if lived up to by the pupil will sustain and bring him safely through all the

trials and temptations of life. Like silent sentinels these incarnated companions will guard and inspire his conduct through all the years to come. He cannot fail if these tried and trusted friends can be called to his aid in every hour of danger.

Religious life is a growth from within, not an accretion from without. The teacher provides the environment for its growth by exposing the students to the contagion of high religious ideals embodied in human lives, the best and most inspiring that the world has ever had, assisted by song, prayer and scripture combined in worship. Every enthusiastic teacher with the Spirit of God to assist him can put over these lessons, and if they are given as here suggested, they will not fail.

The text has been written under pressure of time and no doubt many imperfections will be noted. The author lays no great claim to Bible scholarship or originality, but he has tried to acquaint himself as best he could with the characters depicted. In order that he might be as accurate as possible he has consulted many authorities and sources of information. To all of these he hereby acknowledges his indebtedness and gratitude. Everyone may not agree with his delineation and interpretation of these men and women of the Bible. Space was limited and a great deal had to be left out. Differences of opinion as to where the emphasis should be placed are bound to exist. But this should not detract from the value of the lessons or the plan itself. These, so far as the author is aware, are original and have grown from his observations and many years experience as a teacher.

Special thanks are due Professor Guy C. Wilson, chairman of the text-book Committee, who after careful investigation accepted the plan, and offered valuable

suggestions. Appreciation is also extended to Dr. Joseph F. Merrill, Commissioner of Education, who has read several of the lessons and given them his hearty endorsement.

EZRA C. DALBY.

*August,* 1930.

1. Kendrick $4.85
2. Alward – not paid $2.50. No Ref.
3. Nylen – none.
4. Best $2.35
5. Harris –
6. Best O. – None.
7. Marlo $2.35
8. Arthur $4.85
9. Lawrence –
10. Veil –
11. Duane – None.
12. Norman – None.
13. Wilmer –

## CONTENTS

Abraham, the First Pioneer—*Leaving Haran* ..... 1
Canaan, the Land of Promise—*"The World in Miniature"*. 8
Lot, the Selfish Nephew—*The Material vs. the Spiritual* ... 13
Abraham, the Host of God—*Entertaining Angels* ..... 18
Sarah, the Steadfast—*Sacredness of Marriage Vows* ..... 22
Abraham, the Father of the Faithful—*Giving the Best We Have* ..... 27
Rebekah, the Bride from Haran—*The Hour of Fate* .... 32
Isaac, the Man of Peace—*Blessed Are the Peacemakers* .... 38
Esau, the Failure—*Selling Our Birthright* ..... 43
Jacob, the Fugitive—*Finding God* ..... 48
Israel, the Prince of God—*Wrestling for a Blessing* ..... 53
Joseph, the Dreamer—*"Dream On, O Youth"* ..... 59
Joseph, the Slave—*The Light Within* ..... 65
Joseph, the Ruler—*Up From a Dungeon* ..... 71
Joseph, the Forgiving Brother—*A Lesson from a Throne* .. 77
Moses in the Desert—*Growth by Meditation* ..... 82
Pharaoh, the Hard Hearted—*Fighting Against God* ..... 87
Jethro, the Priest of Midian—*Sharing Responsibility* ..... 92
Moses, the Lawgiver—*The Voice from Sinai* ..... 96
Aaron, the Spokesman—*Shifting Responsibility* .....101
Caleb, the Faithful Spy—*Arrested Deliverance* .....107
Balaam, the Covetous—*Serving God and Balak* .....113
Moses, the Emancipator and Teacher—*The Valedictory of Moses* .....119
Joshua, the Courageous—*Faith Invincible* .....124
Achan, the Traitor—*Consequence of Sin* .....130
Joshua, the Conqueror—*Choosing Whom We Will Serve* ..135
Deborah, the Prophetess—*A Woman's Courage* .....140
Gideon, the Humble Patriot—*Three Hundred, Plus God* ...145
Gilead, the Country East of the Jordan—*The Land of Gilead* .....150
Abimelech, the Usurper—*Choosing Our Rulers* .....155
Jephthah, the Outcast—*The Making of Vows* .....161
Samson, the Strong—*Frittering Our Strength* .....168

Samson, the Weakling—*Profaning Our Destiny*.....174
Ruth, the Moabitess—*"The Parting of the Ways"*.....180
Samuel, the Child—*Speaking With God*.....188
Eli, the High Priest—*Responsibility of Parents*.....194
Samuel, the King Maker—*Surrendering Authority*.....200
Saul, the First King—*Undiscovered Kings*.....206
Saul, the Rejected—*Obedience versus Sacrifice*.....212
David, the Young Champion—*The Strength of the Weak*..218
Jonathan, the Friend—*Soul Knit to Soul*.....224
Abigail, the Tactful Wife—*A Desert Romance*.....230
David, the King—*A Chalice of Love*.....236
David, the Fallen—*The Wages of Sin*.....242
Absalom, the Rebel Son—*Honoring Parents*.....248
Solomon, the Wise King—*"Ask What I Shall Give Thee"*..254
Solomon, the Builder—*A House for God*.....260
Rehoboam, the Foolish King—*The Folly of Youth*.....266
Jeroboam, the Son of Nebat—*Punishment of Sin*.....272
Jadan, the Disobedient Prophet—*Failure in Little Things*..278
Elijah, the Tishbite Prophet—*Zeal for God*.....283
Elijah, the Courageous Prophet—*God or Baal*.....289
Elijah, the Discouraged Prophet—*The Still Small Voice*...295
Naboth, the Jezreelite—*Standing With the Weak*.....300
Elisha, the Man of God—*Contact With a Prophet*.....306
Naaman, the Leper—*Pride Humbled*.....312
Gehazi, the Hypocrite—*Thou Shalt Not Covet*.....317
Elisha, the Seer—*Seeing the Invisible*.....323
Jehu, the Revolutionist—*A Man of Action*.....328
Amos, the Herdsman Prophet—*A Voice of Warning*.....334
Amos, the Prophet of Justice—*Priest vs. Prophet*.....341
Hosea, the Prophet of Love.....347
Isaiah, the Patriot Prophet—*Send Me*.....353
Hezekiah, the Good King—*Back to God*.....358
Isaiah, the Statesman—*Faith and Prayer*.....363
Micah, the Prophet of the Poor—*True Religion*.....368
Josiah, the Reformer-King—*Finding the Bible*.....374
Zephaniah, the Prophet of Judgment—*The Coming Lord*..379

Nahum, the Prophet of Moral Indignation—*Modern Nineveh* . . . . . 384
Jeremiah, the Prophet of Anathoth—*One Man Against a Nation* . . . . . 389
Jeremiah, the Preacher—*Sitting at the Gate* . . . . . 395
Habakkuk, the Philosopher—*The Watch Tower* . . . . . 400
Jonadab, the Rechabite—*"We Will Drink No Wine"* . . . . . 406
Jeremiah, the Prophet of Affliction—*A Lowly Hero* . . . . . 411
Jeremiah, the Prophet of a New Covenant—*The Law in Our Hearts* . . . . . 416
Jerusalem, "The City Solitary"—*"Lest We Forget"* . . . . . 421
Obadiah, the Prophet of Hatred—*A Nest Among the Stars* 426
Ezekiel, the Prophet of Symbolism—*A Forehead of Flint* 431
Ezekiel, the Prophet of Personal Responsibility—*The Watchman* . . . . . 436
Ezekiel, the Prophet of Hope—*A Life-Giving River* . . . . . 441
Isaiah, the Prophet of Comfort—*A New Day for the Exiles* . . . . . 447
Isaiah, the Prophet of Vicarious Suffering—*Rejected of Men* . . . . . 452
Daniel, the Prophet of Temperance—*Building a Life* . . . . . 457
Belshazzar, the Proud and Impious King—*The Folly of Pride* . . . . . 462
Daniel, the Prophet of Prayer—*The Open Window* . . . . . 467
Zerubbabel, the Leader in a New Day—*Returning with Joy* . 472
Haggai, the Prophet of Temple Building—*Building Temples* . . . . . 478
Zachariah, the Prophet of Gladness—*The Unwalled Town* . . 486
Esther, the Patriot Queen—*"If I Perish, I Perish"* . . . . . 488
Ezra, the Priest and Scribe—*A Wonderful Achievement* . . . 494
Nehemiah, the Wall Builder—*The Power of An Ideal* . . . . . 499
Joel, the Prophet of Pentecost—*Prophecies, Dreams, Visions* . . . . . 505
Job, the Prophet of Suffering—*The Problem of Evil* . . . . . 511
Jonah, the Disobedient Prophet—*The Highest Point* . . . . . 517
Malachi, the Messenger of Jehovah—*God's Jewels* . . . . . 523
Our Bible, the Word of God—*The Book of Life* . . . . . 529

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Map of Western Asia at the Beginning of the Eighth Century B. C. ..... Frontispiece
Map of the Kingdom of Israel and Judah ..... xv
Abram Draws near to Shechem in the "Land of Promise" .. 5
Eliezer and Rebekah ..... 34
The Selling of Joseph ..... 61
The Golden Calf ..... 103
Jephthah ..... 162
Ruth and Naomi ..... 183
Jeroboam's Wife and the Blind Prophet ..... 274
Ahab and Naboth ..... 302
Tekoa, the Home of Amos ..... 336
The Prophet Micah ..... 370
Anathoth, Home of Jeremiah ..... 391
Ezekiel Prophesying ..... 442
Esther and Haman ..... 490

2. Noma N. - Both books fail for $4.85
3. Alice H. $2.35 for Rel.
4. Ruth A. $4.85 for both
5. Ruth S. - " " "
6. Emma C. - " " "
7. Roberta H. None.
8. Artimicia $4.85 for both.
9. Ethanna - " " "
10. Flora -
11. Alice K. - " " "
12. Cassie -
13. Wilma -
14. Noma A. - " " "
15. Annabel - " " "
16. Sarah - " " "
17. Dessie - $2.35
18. Verna $2.35

THE KINGDOMS
OF
ISRAEL AND JUDAH
SCALE OF MILES
0 5 10 20 30 40
35°
36°
33°
32°
31°
Sidon
PHOENICIA
Lebanon
R. Leontes
Anti-Lebanon
Mt. Hermon
KINGDOM
OF
DAMASCUS
Damascus
Abana
Pharpar
Tyre
Dan
Kadesh
Ladder of Tyre
Waters of Merom
THE GREAT SEA
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Aijalon
Ramah
Accho
Golan?
BASHAN
SEA OF CHINNERETH
Ashtaroth
Aphek
Plain of Esdraelon
Mt. Carmel
Gath-hepher
Mt. Tabor
Shunem
R. Kishon
KINGDOM
OF
ISRAEL
R. Jordan
Megiddo
Jezreel
Taanach
Bethshean
Enganim
Dothan
Jabesh Gilead
Abel Meholah
Samaria
Tirzah
Mt. Ebal
Shechem
Mt. Gerizim
Plain of Sharon
River
R. Jabbok
Gilead
GILEAD
AMMON
Shiloh
Joppa
Ono
Penuel
Rabbath Ammon
Gibbethon
Bethel
Michmash
Jericho
Gilgal
Ramah
Anathoth
Valley of Achor
Ekron
Gezer
Mizpeh
Gelah
Valley of Sorek
Ashdod
Bethshemesh
Valley of Elah
Jerusalem
Kidron
Heshbon
Gath
Bethlehem
Maresnah
Tekoa
Beth Peor
Lachish
Judah
Gaza
Hebron
Engedi
Dibon
Gerar
Rimmon
R. Arnon
Rabbath Moab
Beersheba
Wilderness of Judah
SALT SEA (DEAD SEA)
MOAB
ARABIAN DESERT
PHILISTIA
KINGDOM OF JUDAH
Rehoboth
EDOM
C.S.H.& CO., N.Y.
Longitude East from Greenwich

# Land and Leaders of Israel

## Lesson 1

## ABRAHAM, THE FIRST PIONEER

Lesson Text: Genesis 12:1-7; Hebrews 11:8-10.

Song; Student Reading: Hebrews 11:8-10; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Gen. 12:1-2.

Concert Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, we thank thee that thou didst call thy servant Abraham to leave his home and kindred for the sake of the countless thousands who have been blessed because of his faith in thee, and his obedience to thy commandment. May we too hear thy call, and have courage to leave our "Haran," with all its material attractions and worldly pleasures, and for the sake of those who shall come after us, seek until we shall find the "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Give us clearness of vision to see the dangers that beset our path, and fortitude to endure the hardships we may encounter, and strength to conquer every obstacle as we journey to the land of promise, where we may find an abiding place and home with thee. Amen.

*Memory Text: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.—Hebrews* 11:10.

Explain: Gen. 12:1 Thy father's house. 3 In thee be blessed. 4 Lot. 5 And the souls. 6 Locate Sichem or Shechem. Canaanites. 7 An altar. Heb. 11:9 Dwelling in tabernacles. 10 A city which hath foundations.

### THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

#### *Leaving "Haran"*

We are dealing today, not with a mere Bible story, but with one of the supreme events in the history of the world. When Abram and his immediate family left Haran on that eventful day, no holiday was declared. The busy city was not disturbed; the hum of industry did not cease; the laborer continued his daily toil; and competing merchants did not pause to note his going. A few friends and relatives, after telling him that he was making a great mistake, bade him goodbye. That was all. No one dreamed that the story of his pilgrimage from Haran would be told with breathless

interest to countless millions from generation to generation to the end of time. Not even Abram, with all his faith in God, could have dreamed what his going to Canaan would mean to the world. There have been other great adventurous journeys in history. Columbus launched three small vessels upon an unknown sea, and discovered a continent; the Pilgrim Fathers dared to break the ties that bound them to the old world to make their home in an unknown wilderness of the new; David Livingston, with nothing to guide him, explored the darkest recesses of Africa; the Mormon Pioneers dared to face starvation in an arid desert where they had been told that nothing would grow, and made it blossom as the rose. But greater than any of these in its results was the journey of Abram. He founded a nation which gave to the world a true knowledge of God. In that land to which he went, he became the ancestor of prophets, priests and kings, even the King of kings. Three great religions grew out of that pilgrimage—Judaism, Mohammedanism, and best of all, Christianity with its message of love and salvation to all nations. In very deed, all the people of the earth have been blessed through the man who left Haran that day.

Haran in the days of Abram was a prosperous city; while it had not yet reached the zenith of its development, it was a place of note. Located in upper Mesopotamia on the banks of the Belikh river, about sixty miles north of its confluence with the Euphrates, it was the junction of a large caravan trade which made it a commercial center. Stock raising was also an important industry. Besides this, it was the chief seat of the worship of the moon god Sin, which made it a religious center.

Several years before this, Abram's father, with all his family, had come from Ur, of Chaldea, more than five hundred miles to the southeast, and located in Haran because of the rich pasture lands surrounding the city. Great temporal prosperity had come to the family. Abram had ac-

quired vast possessions in flocks and herds and servants. In the meantime Terah, the father, had died and was buried in Haran. It looked as if the family would remain there permanently. In the midst of so much prosperity there was no reason why they should leave.

Then like a bolt out of a clear sky came Abram's call to go. We are not told how this message came to him, but there can be no doubt that it came in a manner so convincing that he dared not ignore it. We gather this from the fact that there was everything to keep him there, and no earthly reason why he should leave. It is no easy matter to break up a home and go to a land that we know nothing about. A hundred ties bind us to country, home and kin. But Abram did not hesitate; he made ready to go. When he was asked where he was going, he could only answer that he did not know; he only knew that God had called him to go. It may have seemed strange to him, for he was seventy-five years old and had no children. How could he become the father of a great nation? He did not know but he trusted God to make good his word. It would be well for us if we could develop a faith like that.

He disposed of all the property that he could not take with him, gathered his flocks and herds, loaded his camels, bade goodbye to his friends and kindred, and started in the direction which God had designated. It was a long journey, five hundred miles to the southwest. We do not know how long it took him, but he was in no hurry. The animals could feed as he went along. He reached Damascus, which has the distinction of being the oldest city in the world. It was old even in Abram's time, four thousand years ago. It is a beautiful place and has an interesting history. When we study the New Testament we shall read of a wonderful experience that Paul had there. Here Abram secured the services of the faithful Eliezer, who figures prominently in a later lesson. His caravan came down on the east side of the Jordan, and is supposed to have crossed the river

at the upper fords, a short distance south of the Sea of Galilee. From there he went direct to the village of Shechem. This was in the center of Canaan, the land that was to be his inheritance.

Here God came to him again and renewed his promise, and Abram built an altar and offered sacrifice. This was no doubt a rude affair, a few rough stones piled on the top of one another, but it was the expression of an unquenchable spiritual instinct which all men have to worship God. Religion needs some center, some shrine, a holy place to which men can go and meet God. Today it finds expression in beautiful churches, cathedrals and temples. It was a long call from that first rude altar erected to the true God in Canaan to the great temple in Jerusalem where the boy Jesus met the doctors.

Some one has said that at one time the vital spark of Christianity lay concealed in a helpless babe in Mary's arms. But two thousand years before that babe was born, a weary pilgrim built a crude altar in that same land and offered a sacrifice to God in which might be found the germ of Christianity. Henceforth, this pilgrim was to wander from place to place in that holy land to which he had come, dwelling in tabernacles, and seeking the city "whose builder and maker is God." And like the grain of mustard seed in the parable that became a great tree in whose branches the birds of heaven might find lodgment, so this man's life has illumined the world with its light, and we see more clearly to walk by faith because he showed us the way.

The Haran of Abraham's day is a mass of ruins. A range of mounds on both sides of the river, with one solitary tower rising above the surrounding desolation, is all that remains of the once flourishing city. It is remembered and talked about only because Abraham lived there, and left in obedience to God's commandment. But it brings a vital message to us across the centuries. There are modern "Harans:" "Harans" in which we live, that hold us in

ABRAM DRAWS NEAR TO SHECHEM IN THE "LAND OF PROMISE"

ruts and habits of life from which we are loathe to break away. God is also calling us to a promised land and city "which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." We, too, must make this great adventure of faith, for we cannot find it until we leave our "Haran." To us also there must come a separation, not necessarily from country, home and kindred, but from the material interests and pleasures that make our lives unprofitable and unfruitful. Like Abraham, we must be pioneers and break new paths for God if we would influence for good the generations that are to follow us.

---

The smallest bark on life's tumultuous ocean,
Will leave a track behind forevermore;
The slightest wave of influence set in motion,
Extends and widens to the eternal shore.
We should be wary, then, who go before
A myriad yet to be, and we should take
Our bearings carefully where breakers roar
And fearful tempests gather; one mistake
May wreck unnumbered barks that follow in our wake.

—Author Unknown.

*Class Problems*

1. Why did Abraham leave Ur? Haran?
2. Why did he remain in Haran in the first place?
3. What is meant by building an altar?
4. What does "Haran" mean to us?
5. In what ways are we tempted to remain in "Haran"?
6. How do you think that God spoke to Abraham?
7. Name modern people who have had similar calls.
8. Why was it hard for Abraham to obey the call?
9. Why did God give Abraham no reason for calling him?
10. Why did Abraham make no permanent home in Canaan?

11. What great religions owe their origin to Abraham's obedience?
12. Locate the places named in this lesson on the map.

Thought: Our religion is worth no more to us than we are willing to sacrifice for it.

## Lesson 2

# CANAAN, THE LAND OF PROMISE

Lesson Text: Deuteronomy 8.

Song; Student Reading: Deut. 8:3; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Deut. 8:11.

Concert Prayer: Our Father in heaven, we thank thee for our home and country. May we also have a desire to know and appreciate the Holy Land, the land of Abraham, the home of ancient prophets, priests and kings, whom thou didst call to make known thy great name in all the earth. May we catch the inspiration of their prophetic message to the world, as revealed in the sacred scripture. Wilt thou give unto each of us a testimony of the divinity of their words and ministry. As we walk the fields and hills of Canaan, may it be unto us also a "land of promise," a gateway to the city of God. Amen.

*Memory Text: Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. — Exodus* 20:12.

Explain: 4 Waxed not old. 8 Pomegranates. 9 Stones are iron. 14 Heart be lifted up. 19 Shall surely perish.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *"The World in Miniature"*

In order to understand the men and the women with whom we are to deal in this book, we must know something about the land in which they lived. The character of people is formed to a great extent by their environment. The nature of their surroundings, the climate, the soil, the products, the forests, the mountains from which they draw inspiration, or to which they flee for refuge, the streams of water which sparkle in the sunlight, or crawl over level places, all combine to influence and determine the conduct and life of any people.

The land of Canaan to which Abraham was sent by the Lord to make his home was different from any other land on earth. It has been called "the world in miniature." Nearly all the physical features of the globe are found there, and every gradation of climate from perpetual snow to tropical heat is experienced within its compass. Such a

country cannot fail to offer a history different from the rest of mankind.

To understand clearly the geographical features of Canaan, it is important to keep in mind five distinct divisions. Extending from north to south there are four parallel regions: first, the Maritime, or Sea Coast plain; second, the Central Range, because it was the center of the land where most of the Israelites lived; third, the Jordan valley; and fourth, the Eastern Range. The fifth division is a depression known as the plain of Esdraelon which extends eastward from the coast and breaks through the Central Range connecting the Jordan valley with the Maritime plain.

Just north of where Abraham pitched his tent when he first entered Canaan was Mount Ebal, the highest peak in the Central Range. He must have ascended this mountain soon after his arrival to view the land which was to be his inheritance. He was right in the heart of Canaan, and from this high elevation he could obtain an excellent view of the entire country.

At his feet was Shechem, located in a narrow valley about a hundred yards wide, between Ebal and Gerizim. This ancient city figures prominently in the later history of Israel. When Jacob returned from Haran, he bought a parcel of ground there, and made it his home for a time. After Joshua had conquered Canaan, he gathered the tribes at Shechem, and expounded to them the words of the Law with its blessings and cursings, the priests chanting its blessings from Gerizim and its cursings from Ebal. In the book of Judges we read of Abimelech, the son of Gideon, being crowned king by the people of Shechem; and when they rebelled against him, he captured the city and sowed its site with salt. It was here also that the Northern tribes revolted against Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, and made Jeroboam their king. The name of the city today is Neblus.

We have already mentioned Gerizim, just south of Shechem. This mountain is not so high as Ebal, but more

famous historically. Ever since the days of Abraham it has been considered a sacred place. After the captivity of the Ten Tribes, the Samaritans built a temple on its summit and worshiped there. Even to this day the remnants of this dying race annually ascend this mountain and celebrate the Feast of the Passover, literally as it was instituted by Moses thirty-five hundred years ago.

Looking beyond Gerizim, ten, twenty, thirty, forty and fifty miles to the south, Abraham would see the Central Range with rocky ridges and small green valleys interspersed. Later in those valleys would nestle the cities and towns of Shiloh, Bethel, Ramah, Gibean, Mizpeh, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Tekoa, Hebron and many more. Some of them were already there. From these places would arise the glory of Israel, her prophets, priests and kings.

Turning westward, he would see the high ridge upon which he was standing letting itself down by irregular terraces to what appeared to be a level plain, sloping toward the sea. This is the Coastal plain on which dwelt the warlike Philistines, who later became a scourge to Israel. Beyond this was the long straight coast line, and the deep blue Mediterranean sea as far as his eye could reach.

To the northwest was the long ridge of Mount Carmel, running down from the summit perhaps thirty-five miles distant. Extending from Carmel on the Mediterranean coast to the valley of the Jordan was the triangular shaped plain of Esdraelon, fertile, well watered, green, and the choicest part of Canaan. Why Abraham turned his back upon this part of the country and selected the forbidding surroundings of Hebron and southern Judea for his home must forever remain a mystery. Rising like a great altar from the plain of Esdraelon, fifteen hundred feet above the rest of the country was Mount Tabor. And a short distance south of Tabor was Mount Gilboa, on the summit of which, Saul the first king of Israel and his sons were killed by the Philistines.

Turning now to the east Abraham saw at some distance the deep trench of the Jordan valley with its tropical jungle, and here and there a glimpse of the serpentine windings of the Jordan river more than a thousand feet below the level of the sea. At his feet and all the way to the Jordan gorge, he would see the barren grey of the Judean hills, with their deep wadies and rocky wilderness. Beyond the Jordan valley he would see first a level stretch of country, and then in an almost unbroken line, the mountains of the Eastern range, from Mount Hermon to the far north, away down into the land of Moab east of the Dead Sea on the south.

The most impressive to us, if we could enjoy this circular sweep of the eye from the summit of Mount Ebal, would be the fact that our vision would cover the whole land. It is hard for us who live in the great West to bring our minds to think of a country so small and circumscribed as Palestine. We wonder how so much could happen in such a small space. And when we are told that nearly all the great characters we shall consider in this book came from within a radius of twenty-five miles of Jerusalem the statement seems incredible. We cannot explain it; we can only say that such is the case.

*Class Problems*

1. Why should we know something about Palestine?
2. Describe Palestine as to: climate, elevation, products, people.
3. Where is Shechem located? Mention the events that have happened there.
4. Name five physical divisions of Palestine.
5. How high is Ebal? Tabor?
6. What great tragedy happened on the summit of Gilboa?
7. What can you say of Gerizim?
8. Tell all you can of the Philistines.

9. Compare the size of Palestine and Utah. United States.
10. Mention another small country that has produced great men.

## Lesson 3

# LOT, THE SELFISH NEPHEW

Lesson Text: Genesis 13:5-16; 19:9-17.

Song; Student Reading: Genesis 13:8-9; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Genesis 13:14-16.

Concert Prayer: Our Eternal Father, we come before thee in gratitude today, and thank thee for thy many blessings. And as thou hast been kind to us, so may we be kind to one another. Help us to realize that it is more blessed to give than to receive. When the great choice of placing our future lives shall come to us, and we see the well-watered valley of the Jordan, with all its rich pastures and alluring beauty, tempting us to enter and take possession, may we remember the nearness of Sodom with all its ugliness of sin and danger to our spiritual life. In that fateful hour, may we have the vision to see that we cannot serve two masters, and strength to remain on the highlands where we can give thee our love and loyalty in fullest measure. For this we humbly pray. Amen.

*Memory Text: No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. —Matt. 6:24.*

Explain: Gen. 13:6 Not able to bear. 8 For we be brethren. 9 Land before thee. 10 Garden of the Lord. Zoar. 12 Cities of the plain. 16 Dust of the earth. 19:9 This one fellow. 14 Sons-in-law. 17 The mountain.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Material vs. the Spiritual*

One summer morning four thousand years ago, two men stood on a lofty summit in central Palestine just west of Bethel. In the clear atmosphere of that land, it was possible for them to view the physical features of the country for many miles in every direction. On three sides, north, west and south, barren limestone hills and wadies, with only a fertile spot here and there, greeted their vision. It was not an attractive sight. But to the east, three thousand feet below where they stood, was the fertile valley of the Jordan, like the garden of the Lord, beautiful to behold, known by report as the wealthy land of the cities of the plain.

The two men were Abraham and Lot his nephew. They had just returned from Egypt, where they had gone be-

cause of a famine in Canaan. It was a sad day for both of them for they had lived together since Lot was a child, and now they had decided to separate. This was made necessary because of the strife between their herdsmen. Both men had great wealth in flocks and herds, and tents, under which dwelt their servants who could not agree. Water was scarce, and each group fought for the wells. It got so bad that Abraham said to Lot:

"Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."

This was Lot's great opportunity to show his gratitude to the man who had taken him to his home when his father died, and cared for him since his childhood. All his great wealth in flocks and herds he owed to the generosity of his benefactor. Every good impulse of his heart should have cried out: "No, indeed, I am not entitled to make the choice. All the land has been given to you. I am here only because of your kindness. All that I have is really yours. It is for you to say where I am to go, but I would rather have a share in your thoughts and faith, and remain in your companionship than anything else that you can give me." Such an answer would have done credit to Lot, and have made Abraham very happy. But he did not say that. He was not willing to meet Abraham's generosity with his own gratitude. On the contrary, "he lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered—everywhere, . . . even as the garden of the Lord," and because all the rest of the land around him appeared barren and unfruitful, he chose the valley of the Jordan as his inheritance. No doubt he chuckled to himself, and said: "I certainly got the best of my uncle on that deal."

He prided himself on his shrewdness. What a prize

he had won! Not only would he have rich pasture lands for his flocks and herds, but he could live in the city as well. There would be no more tent life and moving from place to place for him. His family could enjoy the advantages of city life. Poor, shortsighted Lot, he forgot one thing. We read: "But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." Fine pasture lands, but the worst kinds of neighbors! Material wealth, but moral contamination! A good place for his herds, but spiritual death for his children! A fine choice that was!

Worldly advantage was the only consideration that weighed with Lot. He staked his future life and eternal destiny on the chance of increasing his flocks. The fertility of a plain was worth more to him than a spiritual heritage. Worldly wisdom is often the rankest folly. It grasps for what it can reach in the present, and fails to appreciate the value of a greater good that may be remote. What a pitiful substitute was the ruined home, a lonely and desolate life, a broken heart, and oblivion. Soon he would have no flocks and herds; the city of the plain would be nothing but a desolation, and he only a wanderer without a home or family.

Not so with Abraham. On the barren highlands of Canaan, he remained true to the heavenly vision. Lot left him, but he still had God for his daily companion. This was the message that came to him: "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered." What a promise! What a glorious destiny for the children of Abraham!

Lot thought to make the best of both worlds and lost both. He tried to serve two masters. He feared God, but went to live in Sodom. How lonely and out of place he must have felt in such an environment! He made no friends

there and was more alone than if he had lived on a desert. With what pangs of regret he must have remembered the happy days that were gone, the days that he had spent with Abraham and God. He might have been numbered among the heroes of the faith, but sold his heritage for a fertile plain, near a wicked city.

The tragedy of Lot's life lies in the fact that his experience is so universal. So many follow his example. The choice he made, thousands are making today. To each of us there comes a day when we must choose whom we will serve, God or Mammon. Upon each one of us rests the responsibility of deciding where his life shall be placed. It is as if Abraham was saying: "The land is before you, make your choice." When that fateful moment comes to us, Life or Death is in the balance. Light and darkness are set before us, and we must choose one or the other. We cannot have both. There is no such thing as living with God, if our hearts are set on Sodom. We may choose the valley of the Jordan, but if we do, we forfeit the companionship of Abraham and God. If our hearts are set upon the riches of this world, we lose the opportunity of gaining the riches of eternity. The great principle of seeking "first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," should always determine our conduct. Then there is no danger. The valley of the Jordan will not tempt us. But if we try to compromise, and serve two masters, though we may gain the whole material world, we lose what is worth more than all else—our souls.

---

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth and falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight.
Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right,
And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and the light.

—J. R. Lowell.

*Class Problems*

1. Why did Abraham and Lot separate?
2. How is Abraham's character revealed in this event? Lot's?
3. Why was Lot obligated to Abraham?
4. How do you account for his selfishness?
5. In what ways are we tempted to make a similar choice to Lot's?
6. What is meant by serving two masters?
7. Is it true that we can place our own lives?
8. Do you understand by this lesson that it is wrong to seek material wealth?
9. What is meant by seeking "first the kingdom of God?"
10. What happened to the cities of the plain?
11. What finally happened to Lot?
12. What is the message of this lesson to us?

Things to think about:

Temptation should be looked upon as an opportunity rather than a danger.

Lot had selected the valley of the Jordan for a home many times before he went there to live.

## Lesson 4

# ABRAHAM, THE HOST OF GOD

Lesson Text: Genesis 18.

Song; Student Reading: Genesis 18:1-8; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Genesis 18:17-19.

Concert Prayer: Heavenly Father, wilt thou send thy angels to eat and walk and talk with us as they did with thy ancient servant, that we may receive the strength and courage which comes from a contact so holy. May they lead us from the paths of sin, and guide us into thy presence. And as Abraham interceded for wicked Sodom, so we pray, not for ourselves alone, but for all thy children, even those who have forgotten thee, and wandered from the way of life. Wilt thou bring them back into fellowship with thee, we humbly pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. —Hebrews* 13:2.

Explain: 1 The plains of Mamre. 2 Three men. 3 My Lord. 4 And wash your feet. 6 Three measures. Cakes. 7 Tender and good. 8 Butter. 14 Too hard for the Lord. 19 For I know him. 21 I will go down.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Entertaining Angels*

It is the hour of noon. The searching heat of the Hebron sun beats down relentlessly upon the ancient city. All labor has ceased. Both man and beast seek the shade at that hour, if any is near. Abraham sits in the door of his tent under a spreading oak. He is not idle, but alert and watchful for any passing pilgrim who may be in need of food and shelter. His whole thought is one of hospitality and good will. Suddenly three men appear. They are coming toward him. Instantly he is on his feet and running to meet them. He bows himself to the ground in token of homage, saying: "My Lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away. * * * Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree: And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on."

What hearty hospitality! Could finer or truer cour-

tesy be imagined? Water for the feet is necessary in a land where only sandals are worn, and where the feet soon become foul and parched. To bathe them is a most gratifying refreshment, and as necessary for comfort as the quenching of thirst. In this humility, he diminishes the merit of what he intends to do for their entertainment. He seemed to regard the opportunity of entertaining these strangers as a rare privilege which God had provided for him.

When we read this beautiful story of genuine hospitality, we are reminded of another heavenly visitant who was urged in similar words to stay for entertainment. Luke tells the story. It was Jesus on the same day he was resurrected who joined two disciples who were walking to Emmaus, and entered into conversation with them. They did not recognize him, but talked to him as if he were a stranger. When they reached the village, he made as if he would go on. But they constrained him, saying: "Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And he went in to tarry with them.

A story is told of a good man who attained the highest position in the church. Every evening he used to entertain at his own table twelve poor men. He did this as a memorial to the twelve men whom Jesus had called to be his apostles. One night as he sat at supper with his poor guests, he saw another man come in and seat himself at the head of the table. Hurriedly he called the steward, and said: "I told you to invite only twelve, and there are thirteen guests." The steward counted them, and replied: "No, your highness, there are only twelve." The good man held his peace. But after the supper, he called the unbidden guest and asked him: "Who art thou?" And he replied: "I am the poor man whom thou didst formerly relieve. My name is 'The Wonderful,' and through me thou shalt obtain whatsoever thou shalt ask of God." Then he knew that he had entertained an angel, even Jesus Christ himself.

Jesus said to the righteous in his great parable of the

Last Judgment: "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in." They could not understand this, for they did not remember of ever having seen him before. But he explained: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

There is something gripping in the thought that when we entertain a guest in need, we are entertaining Jesus. Someone has written of Dorcas, one of the heroines of the New Testament, who spent her time in sewing garments for the widows and poor who lived in Joppa: "Perhaps she remembered her Lord's commandment, 'I was naked and ye clothed me,' and thought that, if it was true that in clothing the poor, she clothed Christ, she would do it with no other hands than her own, for it might be that she would, in spirit at least, draw virtue from the hem of *His* garment while she made them."

In the case of Abraham, while he still thought his guests were ordinary strangers, he prepared a meal so elaborate, that he could have made it no better if he had known who his visitors really were. Instead of giving the strangers a mere *morsel* of bread and a *little* water, Sarah prepared cakes, Abraham fetched a calf, "tender and good," and the young man hastened to dress it. Butter and milk were added for good measure. The three guests sat down, and Abraham himself did the part of an attentive host, and courteously stood by them while they ate under the tree.

And all the time he was entertaining the Lord and two angels and did not know it. How astonished he must have been when it dawned upon him that he was waiting on the "Judge of all the earth", as he later called him! And yet, if as Jesus says, we feed him when we feed one of the least of his brethren, what is the difference? Every service performed, every courtesy rendered, every evidence of friendship, of hospitality, of charity, of kindness, or of good will that we manifest to one in need is done to the Lord himself,

and he accepts it as such. This is worth remembering, and putting into practise.

---

"This tent is mine," said Yussouf, "but no more
Than it is God's; come in, and be at peace;
Freely shalt thou partake of all my store,
As I of His who builded over these
Our tents His glorious roof of night and day,
And at whose door none ever yet heard nay."

*Class Problems*

1. Do you think we should entertain all strangers? Why?
2. How can we show real hospitality today?
3. Do you really believe that every deed done to another person is done to the Lord?
4. Where do you find the story of Dorcas? What happened to her?
5. What two special reasons did the angels have for visiting Abraham?
6. Do you think that the Lord would have saved the righteous in Sodom if Abraham had not made the request? Give reasons.
7. Would not it have been better for Abraham to have asked at once for Lot to be saved? Give reasons.
8. Give a character sketch of Abraham.

## Lesson 5

# SARAH, THE STEADFAST

Lesson Text: Genesis 12:10-20; 16:1-9; 21:1-14.

Song; Student Reading: Gen. 12:18-20; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Gen. 21:9-11.

Concert Prayer: Heavenly Father, we humbly pray that thou wilt give unto us the steadfastness and courage of her whom thou didst name Sarah, the Princess. We honor her memory as the mother of the faithful, and are grateful to be numbered among her descendants. Wilt thou help us also to live so worthily that we may receive a new name of honor and distinction. Give us the qualities of mind and heart that she so wonderfully exemplified in her long life of loyalty and devotion to the great man who was her companion. Help us to realize that in this constant changing world there are some things in our lives that should endure unchanged, among which are the sacred vows and covenants we make with thee and one another. May we always remember this, we humbly pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.—Gen. 2:24.*

Explain: 12:11 Egypt. 13 Thou art my sister. 15 Pharaoh. 17 Plagued Pharaoh. 16:4 Hagar. Her mistress was despised. 5 My wrong be upon thee. 7 Angel of the Lord. 21:3 Isaac. 12 In Isaac shall thy seed be called. 14 Beersheba.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Sacredness of Marriage Vows*

Did you ever attend a Golden Wedding anniversary? These are among our most interesting events. When a husband and wife have lived together for fifty years, it is fitting that their children and their children's children should come from far and near to honor them. There is something impressive and gripping about such an occasion. Their long years of loyalty and devotion to one another deserves the highest commendation. Such a couple, though the years may have furrowed their cheeks and whitened their hair, are very beautiful. They have demonstrated in their lives the sacredness of marriage vows, and have given the lie to those who declare from press and platform that marriage is a failure. Fortunate indeed is such a pair! Their children

will rise up to call them blessed, and hold their names in everlasting remembrance from generation to generation.

And if fifty years of successful married life deserves such high commendation, what shall we say of a couple who rounded out a full hundred years together? Not only that, but their love for each other was as perfect and complete at the end of that time, as it was when their thrilling romance began.

There is something almost divinely beautiful in Sarah's love and devotion to Abraham. This is the outstanding quality by which she lives in our memory. In all the changing vicissitudes of his active and interesting life, she was ever at his side. If she ever murmured or complained, we have no record of it. Day in and day out, from week to week, and year to year, in storm and in calm, in shadow and in sunshine, amidst the city's teeming thousands, or on the lonely desert where no neighbor's voice was heard, in the glory and beauty of young womanhood, or when her step was feeble and the burden of the years was heavy to bear, she was ever the sweetheart and lover, the devoted wife, the dear companion and counselor of her husband.

There were days and years of that long stretch of time when she must have been tried to the utmost. She left two homes of comfort and luxury to accompany her pilgrim husband on his wanderings. This in itself was a great sacrifice, especially when we remember that she had no idea where she was going. In both places she left relatives and friends forever. This must have cost her many tears and sleepless nights. But she went, not perhaps because she had Abraham's glorious vision of the mighty destiny that awaited them, but because she had faith in him and loved him.

No sooner had they reached their new home in Canaan than the famine came to try their faith. They were literally starved out of the land and had to take refuge in Egypt. This was a new experience, and one that must have tried Sarah's faith to the limit. Up to this time she had always lived in the

midst of plenty. Now she knew what it was to be hungry. Such a trial can only be appreciated by those who have experienced it. A calamity absorbs all a person's care and attention. At such a time, it is hard to sing: "God is in heaven, and all is right with the world." Our daily bread is very important, and our religious life cannot develop very well without it. The man of supreme faith may be able to say: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." But for most of us, including Sarah, it is pretty hard to say, "Thy will be done," if we are starving.

But worse than hunger, harder to be borne than the need of bread, was a new trial that awaited Sarah when they reached the borders of Egypt. This was the danger that threatened her because of her beauty. Abraham said to her: "Sarah, you are very beautiful (she had always been proud of it for his sake), and I may have to suffer because of it. When the men of Egypt see you, they will want to possess you for their own, and they will kill me if they know that you are my wife. But you can protect me if you will. Pretend that you are not my wife by telling them that you are my sister. This will save my life." Whatever Abraham's motives may have been in asking Sarah to engage in this deception, we can imagine her feelings when he made the request. It would be hard to imagine a more terrible strain on a wife's love. And yet she stood the strain and did as he asked. She was willing to save him for his destiny by sacrificing herself. It turned out as Abraham had said; her beauty was noticed and reported to the king and she was taken to his house. Her husband's life was saved, but if God had not intervened, it would have been at the cost of his wife's honor. We can well imagine that Abraham spent some anxious hours before she was restored to him.

Much has been written in regard to this incident, and Abraham has been severely condemned for making the request he did. But so few of the facts are known that it is best for us to withhold our judgment. No doubt he had

faults like other men, but selfishness and cowardice were not among them, as is amply proved by other incidents in his life. The test may have been for Sarah's benefit. If so, she went through with it grandly, like the great woman she was. No matter how great Abraham was, she was certainly worthy to stand by his side. If he deserved to be called the father of the faithful, she no less deserves to be named the mother of the faithful.

The clouds cleared from Canaan, and Abraham and Sarah returned. Years came and went, bringing great temporal prosperity to them. But it must have been a dull monotonous life of Sarah. No fixed home, no neighbors, no friends, living in a tent under the burning sun of Canaan, moving here and there to find pasturage for their flocks and herds. Besides this, there must have been in Sarah's heart a constant throb of pain. No heir had been born to Abraham. The promise had been made to him that he was to become the father of a great nation. But no promise had been made to her, and she must have concluded that it was not meant for her. Again she sacrifices herself for his sake. He must have an heir. She takes matters into her own hands and gives him her slave Hagar to wife, reasoning to herself that if Hagar has a son, she can adopt him as her own. But it did not work out as she had planned. Hagar claimed her own son, and it brought no end of trouble to both of them.

Finally the joyful announcement was made by heavenly messengers that Sarah herself was to be the mother of a son, and he was to be the heir. While the news was almost too good for her to believe at first, it turned out to be true. She bore Abraham a son and called his name Isaac. The joy of the event was somewhat marred by the jealousy of Hagar and her son, Ishmael. It got so bad that Sarah finally insisted that Abraham must send the bondwoman and her son away. He complied with her request much to his own regret, but no doubt it was for the best. Had Ishmael and

his mother remained, there would have been no end of strife and contention in Abraham's home.

Sarah exerted a profound influence in the development of Isaac's character. This was the crowning achievement of her self-sacrificing life. She proved herself as great a mother as she had been a wife, and her love and reverence for her husband endured until the end. And he reciprocated that love. When she died at the age of 127 years, we read: "And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her." The only piece of ground he ever owned in Canaan, he bought as a burial place for her.

So ended a hundred years of married life, a century of undying loyalty and love, the longest and the happiest of which we have any record. God honored Sarah by naming her the Princess, and we revere her memory for her constancy and steadfastness and devotion to God and the great earthly ideal of her life, her husband Abraham.

---

Cling closer, closer, life to life, cling closer heart to heart;
The time will come, my own wed wife, when you and I must part.
Let nothing break our band but death, for in the world above
'Tis the breaker death that soldereth, our ring of wedded love.
—Gerald Massey.

*Class Problems*

1. Find out all you can about Sarah's "home town."
2. Name the outstanding characteristic of Sarah.
3. Contrast the characters of Abraham and Sarah.
4. How do you account for their happy married life?
5. What sacrifices did Sarah make for Abraham? Abraham for Sarah?
6. Why are there so many divorces today?
7. Enumerate the evils that result from divorces.
8. What responsibilities have young people for the divorces of the future?

## Lesson 6

# ABRAHAM, THE FATHER OF THE FAITHFUL

Lesson Text: Genesis 22:1-19; Hebrews 11:17-19.

Class Song; Student Reading: Genesis 22:11-12; Prayer by Student.

Concert Prayer: Heavenly Father, wilt thou bestow upon us in richest measure the precious gift of faith. Help us to become like unto thy servant Abraham, whose wonderful life of faith shines down upon us through four thousand years of doubt and uncertainty among so many of thy children. In all the tests and trials of life, may we always believe and trust in thee and in thy mercy and goodness. Help us to live and magnify the highest truth we know, and open our minds and hearts to new truth as it shall be revealed to us in the coming years, we humbly pray. Amen.

*Memory Text: Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove: and nothing shall be impossible unto you. —Matthew* 17:20.

Explain: 1 God did tempt. 2 Moriah. 6 Laid the wood on Isaac. 6 Took the fire in his hand. 11 The angel. 12 Upon the lad (his age). 14 Jehovah-jireh. 19 Beer-sheba.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Giving the Best We Have*

This lesson may be either one of the perplexing stories in the Bible, hard to understand, or one of the most stimulating and inspiring examples of faith ever penned. In the name of religion, Abraham went forth to sacrifice his only son. He fully intended to imbue his hands in the blood of his innocent boy. Is it possible for us to conceive of anything more revolting? Can we believe that God would test a man by asking him to put a knife in the heart of his son? How could faith demand such a thing? We are inclined to say that it is impossible. God could not require such a sacrifice.

But let us examine the story a little closer. In the first place, Abraham did not think it was wrong for him to offer his son to God. His own conscience did not conflict with God's command. He lived in the midst of a heathen

community, where children were constantly being sacrificed to the gods of the land. These people believed in dedicating the most precious things they had to their deities. If they were willing to do that to their false gods, should Abraham withhold his son from the true God? He was ready to answer that question in the negative.

Now the spirit of dedication in religion is absolutely right. Dedication in some form or other is really the vital part of religion. Abraham felt the spirit of dedication, and that God was entitled to the best and most precious thing he had. In that spirit he went forth to sacrifice his son. He was absolutely loyal to God's requirement as he understood it at that time.

We condemn what he intended to do, of course. We know now that God does not require parents to slay their children upon an altar to please him. The very idea is abhorrent to us, and the man who should attempt such a thing today would be considered either insane or criminal. Abraham came to see that also. But at that time the call to sacrifice Isaac was his highest conception of loyalty to God, and he faithfully undertook to carry it out. That was where his faith came in and for that we cannot commend him too highly. In the matter of faith we must follow the best light we have. It may not be the highest light, but it is the highest we see.

Abraham went forth to follow that light in the greatest agony of soul. There must have been a terrible conflict in his mind and heart all the while. Isaac was his child of promise. All his expectations of a great posterity were centered in him. His death would shatter every hope he had for the future. That was the conflict he had.

It is easy enough to distinguish between right and wrong when there is no conflict of loyalties. If it is a question of being honest or dishonest, there is no trouble in deciding what we should do. The same is true of lying or

153153



telling the truth, or any other choice where the right thing to do is clearly seen. In such cases there is no conflict.

But the difficulty comes when the choice is between two things that, so far as we can see, are both right. Abraham was up against such a conflict. He sincerely believed that it was right for him to dedicate the best he had to God, and in conflict with that was his love for his son, the most sacred impulse of a father's heart. Then, too, God had promised him a great destiny. That was why he had come to Canaan. If he killed Isaac how could the promise be fulfilled?

So the conflict raged in Abraham's soul, and he could see no way of reconciling the two. But the highest thing he saw was dedication, and he went forth to make the sacrifice. We cannot begin to imagine the pain that it cost him. What pathos in that journey from Beersheba to Moriah! The father and the son in intimate companionship to the very moment of the impending tragedy. As they ascended the hill together, how the words of Isaac grip us! "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" And Abraham's answer, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." And then we read, "So they went both of them together."

In those final moments of agony, Abraham could only have been sustained by his unwavering faith. Here his sublime confidence and trust in God reaches the very highest point that mortal men have ever attained in this world. He felt that God could even raise Isaac from the dead after he was slain to accomplish his purposes. He was Master of the world, the Ruler of heaven and earth. The issue was in his hands. What magnificent faith he had! What devoted loyalty! What wonderful trust in God! It has been the inspiration of the ages, and comes to us as a glorious heritage. No wonder Abraham was called the friend of God.

Now notice what happened. Abraham had been true

to the dictates of his conscience. Though perplexed and troubled, he had followed the highest light he had. But he had not closed his mind to new truth. He was still in touch with heaven seeking new light. And lo, a miracle happened! At the very moment when the knife was raised to slay his son, an angel's voice is heard: "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him."

Abraham discovered that the God he served could not require such a sacrifice. The spirit of dedication was right, but the way he was carrying it out was wrong. God did not demand worship which conflicted with the noblest affections of the human heart. Abraham, through this trial, also made the discovery that the instinct of parenthood was divine. Isaac came back to him as it were from the dead with a new halo of reverence around his head, a new gift from God, more sacred than when he was born.

As we read the story, it seems as if Abraham acted mechanically in the matter; that he was a mere automaton in the experience. But this interpretation is wrong. It was not just blind obedience. He was an active agent in the discovery that human sacrifice is wrong. Through a great experience he came to see a new and glorious truth.

The lesson brings to us a clear and unmistakable message. We should be obedient and loyal to the highest light we have and never close our minds to new light. If Abraham had said: "I have got to sacrifice my son no matter what happens," he would have been a fanatic, and God could not have revealed new truth through him. It is by using our spiritual intelligence that we make progress in matters of conscience. God intends for us to use this intelligence. That is how we come stage by stage to make new discoveries concerning the character and attributes of God. Two things then are required of us: first, obedience and loyalty to the light we have; and second, open minds to receive new truth when it shall be revealed.

There is no chance, no destiny, no fate,
Can circumvent or hinder or control
The firm resolve of a determined soul.
Gifts count for nothing; will alone is great;
All things give way before it soon or late.
What obstacle can stay the mighty force
Of the sea-seeking river in its course,
Or cause the ascending orb of day to wait?
Each well born soul must win what it deserves.
Let the fool prate of luck. The fortunate
Is he whose earnest purpose never swerves,
Whose slightest action or inaction serves,
The one great aim. Why, even Death stands still,
And waits an hour sometimes for such a will.

—Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

*Class Problems*

1. How could God ask a man to slay his son?
2. How could Abraham decide to do it, and a man today refuse?
3. Does religion demand such a sacrifice? Discuss the question.
4. Why is Abraham commended for being willing to sacrifice his son?
5. Why did his conscience approve the sacrifice?
6. What is meant by a conflict of loyalties in this lesson?
7. Could Abraham have learned that human sacrifice is wrong if he had failed in this test? Why?
8. What two important things are learned in this lesson? Discuss.
9. Why cannot God reveal new truth to everybody?
10. How do you think God revealed himself to Abraham at this time?

## Lesson 7

# REBEKAH, THE BRIDE FROM HARAN

**Lesson Text:** Genesis 24.

Song; Student Reading: Gen. 24:17-20; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Gen. 24:7.

Concert Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, help us to remember in our lives and conduct that little things are all important; that upon a simple "yes" or "no" may depend eternal destinies. And when the great opportunity of our lives shall come to us, may we realize that it is the hour of fate, and answer as Rebekah did, "I will go." For strength to live and act so that we may recognize that great moment when it comes, we humbly pray. Amen.

*Memory Text: Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth forever; that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.—Ezra* 9:12.

Explain: 2 Eldest servant. 4 My country * * * my kindred. 10 Mesopotamia. 11 At the time of the evening. 12 Send me good speed. 15 Upon her shoulder. 21 Held his peace. 22 Golden ear ring. 32 Ungirded his camels. 49 That I may turn to the right hand. 50 Speak unto thee bad or good. 59 Her nurse. 63 To meditate. 64 She lighted off the camel. 67 Isaac was comforted.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *"The Hour of Fate"*

We are back in Haran, back in Abraham's old home. Little change has taken place, though nearly sixty years have passed since that eventful day, when Abraham bade his relatives goodbye. The daughters and wives of the men of Haran still gather at the well just outside of the city in the evening to draw water and gossip of the day's happenings, as they did long ago when Sarah was one of the familiar figures at these gatherings. Now Sarah is dead, and her name is only a memory in her former home. Abraham has never been back, and he is now too old ever to visit his kindred again.

But he has not forgotten them, and that is why there is a stranger at the well tonight. The man must be on an important errand, for ten camels heavily loaded with goods are

kneeling around him, with their attendants standing near. At this moment he is engaged in prayer, and if we approach close enough, we may hear his words: "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master."

While he was still praying, a damsel, very fair and beautiful to look upon, came to the well and filled her pitcher. It was Rebekah the grand-daughter of Abraham's brother Nahor. The servant did not know this but she attracted his attention immediately, and he ran to meet her with the request: "Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher."

Rebekah could have refused his request with apparent justice. The man was a total stranger to her and might be a foe. She was under no obligation to serve him and might have stood on her dignity with a proud and cautious reserve. That is what many women would have done, even in that age of general hospitality and good will to strangers. This is evidenced by the way that the woman of Samaria responded to a similar request from Jesus at Jacob's well.

Rebekah was unconscious of any particular significance that might attach to her answer. And yet the destinies of untold millions depended at that moment upon what she would say in response to the stranger's request. The incident brings vividly before us what great issues apparently depend upon little things. Had Rebekah failed at that moment to measure up to what the faithful servant of Abraham conceived to be the ideal wife for Isaac, he would no doubt have looked elsewhere, and her opportunity of becom-

ELIEZER AND REBEKAH

ing the mother of a great spiritual nation, and the ancestress of the Son of God would have been gone forever.

What a lesson for us! There are some moments in our lives that are fraught with eternal weal or woe. Opportunity knocks at our door, and calls on us to follow. If we fail to hear the summons, or refuse to answer, the chance goes by forever. Another takes our place, and we are left behind.

But Rebekah was ready for the "moment." Her answer was prompt and cordial. She was anxious to serve the stranger's needs. She was glad, not only to give a drink to him, but offered to draw water for his camels as well. This was unusually considerate and gracious on her part, for there were ten of these to supply, and she must fill her pitcher many times to quench their thirst. She did far more than she was asked, and she did it gladly and with such good will that she won the servant's heart. Little things, simple acts, are the most reliable tests of character. They reveal the real nature of a person more truthfully than a well-studied part acted out for great occasions.

While the camels were drinking, Eliezer, the servant, took a gold earring and bracelet, and said: "Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in?" She promptly told him her family relation, and in keeping with the cordiality already shown, she went beyond his request for lodging, by assuring him of straw and provender besides; then she runs home to tell her parents what has happened, and shows them the presents she has received.

Eliezer receives a hearty welcome. The name of Abraham is sacred in this home, and the coming of his servant is a great event. But he refuses to eat until he has made known his errand. With simple eloquence he tells his story, and asks that Rebekah may become the wife of Abraham's son. Her mother and her brother Laban have been so impressed that they dare not refuse the request. Then

Eliezer urged that they depart immediately. To this they demur, but refer the matter to Rebekah for decision. When the question is put to her, she promptly answers, "I will go."

Some have blamed Rebekah for being willing to go on such short notice. But we must remember that Eliezer had convinced them all that it was God's will, and that he must not be hindered in carrying out his mission. Her decision rested upon a religious basis and should be commended.

The parting must have been sad, for those left behind would never see their daughter and sister again. But the historian does not dwell on that. He simply says: "And Rebekah rose, and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man: and the servant took Rebekah, and rode away." Perhaps that is the best way to say it. All of us can imagine that last hour before she "rode away."

*Opportunity*

Master of human destinies am I,
Fame, love, and fortune on my footsteps wait;
Cities and fields I walk; I penetrate
Deserts and seas remote, and passing by
Hovel, the mart, and palace, soon or late,
I knock unbidden, once at every gate;
If sleeping wake, if feasting rise before
I turn away. It is the hour of fate,
And they who follow me reach every state
Mortals desire, and conquer every foe,
Save death. But they who doubt or hesitate,
Condemned to failure, penury and woe,
Seek me in vain, and uselessly implore,
I answer not, and I return no more.

—J. J. Ingalls.

*Class Problems*

1. Why did Abraham seek a wife from Haran for his son?

2. Give a character sketch of Eliezer from the data in this chapter.
3. Where would he be likely to stop on his journey? Why?
4. Under what circumstances did he meet Rebekah?
5. Why did not Abraham send Isaac to secure his own wife?
6. Give a character sketch of Rebekah from the data in this lesson.
7. Discuss the importance of little things.
8. Why do writers condemn Rebekah for leaving home so soon?
9. Can you justify her conduct?
10. In what respect is it true, that Opportunity knocks only once at every gate? In what respect is it untrue?

## Lesson 8

# ISAAC, THE MAN OF PEACE

Lesson Text: Genesis 26:12-33.

Class Song; Student Reading: Genesis 26:24-25; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Genesis 26:18.

Concert Prayer: Our Father in heaven, may we remember Isaac as a man who would rather suffer wrong than do wrong; a man of peace who resisted not evil, but overcame evil with good. Help us to emulate his example in this respect. Thou hast said, "If thy enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink." Give us courage to do this, to love our enemies and do good to those who injure us; remembering always that peace is better than strife, and that vengeance is thine, not ours. For this we humbly pray. Amen.

*Memory Text: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.—Matthew* 5:39.

Explain: 14 Philistines. 17 Gerar. 20 Did strive. 23 Beersheba. 12 Hundred fold. 15 Stopped them.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Blessed Are the Peacemakers*

In the last lesson, we left Rebekah as she rode away with Eliezer from Haran. Before taking up the lesson on Isaac, we should perhaps bring the two together. At this time Isaac was forty years old, but so far he seems to have taken no active part in his father's affairs. His mother has been dead three years and he still mourns for her. Much of his time is spent in solitude and meditation. On the evening of the day when Rebekah reached the end of her journey, we read: "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and behold, the camels were coming."

Rebekah's conduct was proper in every way. She lighted from the camel and veiled herself. She seemed to have a genuis for doing the right thing at the right moment. What a meeting that was, faith meeting faith. Rebekah's faith was adventurous and bold, while Isaac's was meditative and meek. Each was worthy of the other, and it was love at

first sight. We read: "And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

Abraham Lincoln said that God must love the common people because he made so many of them. By general agreement of all writers, Isaac belongs to that great class. Perhaps it was because he was overshadowed by the transcendent genius of his father. Abraham's life was so wonderful, and so filled with great adventures that there was little left for Isaac to do. Add to this the heroic figure of his son Jacob, who stood on the other side of him, and he is quite crowded out of the picture. And as if these two were not enough, there was the strong-willed Rebekah who ruled his home, to make up for good measure. In the shadow of these great characters, Isaac appeared very ordinary. So far as we know, he was never twenty-five miles away from the place where he was born. No great deed is associated with his memory. He lacked intenseness and daring, and we read the simple story of his life without a thrill.

And yet somehow we love him. Perhaps this is because he represents in his life and character the overwhelming majority of mankind. We feel that he is one of us because he glorifies the commonplace. We cannot all be heroes like Abraham and Jacob, standing out conspicuously like great mountain peaks above the surrounding country. And it is well that we cannot, for the world needs more than peaks to make it beautiful. Isaac is of our kin. We can walk with him on level fields; help him dig his wells and feel at home to worship at his altars.

It is interesting to note that his descendants felt that way about him too. In the cave of Machpelah, which Abraham purchased as a burial place for Sarah, all three of the patriarchs are buried with their wives. There are six monuments erected to their memory. One is larger and more imposing than the other five. This we would immediately

say must be Abraham's. On being told that it is not, our next guess would be Jacob. But to our surprise we are told that it belongs to Isaac. And our surprise increases when we learn that among the Jews there is a deep undercurrent of reverence for the name of Isaac, and that for him they reserve the greatest honors.

We read in the text of the great prosperity that attended Isaac, and that because of his success, the Philistines envied him and persecuted him. They stopped up the wells which his father Abraham had dug and claimed the wells which his own servants had digged. Instead of fighting for his rights as most men would have done, Isaac withdrew and left his enemies in possession. This was repeated several times until the Philistines desisted and left him in peace. Thus patience and forbearance won for him more than strife could have achieved. What was a well or ten wells for him if by sacrificing them he could win the regard of his enemies?

Many people have condemned Isaac for his passive and non-resistant attitude. They contend that since he was in the right, he should have drawn the sword and fought it out. If some great principle had been at stake, such as violating his conscience, surrendering his religion, or betraying a trust, he should, of course, have resisted but as it was, he was right in yielding for the sake of peace. He did exactly what Jesus two thousand years later told his disciples to do when he said, "Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Isaac is the first example in the Old Testament to practise that great Christian principle. He loved his enemies, and did good to them instead of harm. One writer has said: "Nothing can be saner or sweeter than this ancient tale, with its apparent moral for those who think that the strongest thing is to retaliate, to assert every claim, to cede no possible advantage. 'The grandest thing in having rights is that, being our rights, we can give them up.' "

Let men call Isaac commonplace if they will. He taught us the beauty, the poetry, the eternal blessedness of work, and he was the world's first peacemaker. When he went to make his final home in Beersheba, we read that he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants digged a well. Altar, tent, and well—these stand for religion, home and work. They are the vital things of life. Isaac was true to his religion, loyal and devoted to his home, stayed with his work as a well-digger and lived at peace with all men. What higher tribute can be paid to any man? "Four thousand years men have drunk the sweet waters of the Beersheba well, and blessed the memory of the man who digged the well."

---

"We cannot all be heroes, and thrill a hemisphere
With some great daring venture, some deed that mocks at fear;
But we can fill a lifetime with kindly acts and true;
There is always noble service for noble souls to do.
We cannot all be preachers, and sway with voice and pen,
As strong winds sway the forests, the minds and hearts of men;
But we can be evangels to souls within our reach,
There is always love's own gospel for loving hearts to preach." —Author Unknown.

Story of Auntie Jabou[illegible] young lady could not sing [illegible] recite lay music or do anything in Public ro. Dalby showed how she excelled good works.

*Class Problems*

1. Tell about the meeting of Isaac and Rebekah.
2. Give a character sketch of Isaac.
3. Was he justified in giving up his own wells for the sake of peace? Give reasons for your answer.
4. What is meant by the statement: A man can have too great a father?
5. How do you account for the fact that the most im-

posing monument in the cave of Machpelah is erected to the memory of Isaac?

6. How did Isaac follow the teachings of Christ?
7. How do you account for the great wealth of Isaac?
8. What is the significance of the statement in Genesis 26:25?

## Lesson 9

# ESAU, THE FAILURE

Lesson Text: Genesis 25:27-34; 27:1-41; Hebrews 12:16-17.

Song; Student Reading: Heb. 12:16-17; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Gen. 27:28.

Concert Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, we approach thee in all humility today, and pray for strength and help to sacredly preserve our glorious heritage. We are weak and often tempted, but thou art strong. May we lean on thy strength in our hour of need, and never barter or exchange thy great promises for a "mess of pottage." Give us vision to see our mighty destiny, and courage to walk in the way that leads to its fulfilment. Amen.

*Memory Text: And (he) rose up, and went his way; thus Esau despised his birthright.—Gen.* 25:34.

Explain: Gen. 25:27 Cunning hunter. 29 Sod pottage. 30 Red pottage. 31 Birthright. 33 Swear to me. 34 Despised his birthright. 27:3 Venison. 4 Savoury meat. Bless thee before I die. 11 Hairy man — smooth man.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Selling Our Birthright*

If ever a man was well born, it was Esau the son of Isaac. His grandfather Abraham, called the friend of God, had been chosen by the Lord because of his conspicuous faith to become the founder of a great nation, and the ancestor, humanly speaking, of the Son of God. Alone among all the millions of the human race the glory of God and his covenant with men was to be with this wonderful family.

God had said of Abraham, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord." That this great end might be realized, Isaac had been given to Abraham and his loyal wife, the steadfast Sarah, as a child of promise. Then after the parents had given to the fortunate boy the best instruction and training of which they were capable, with God's approval, a wife was selected for him from among his own people and kindred. And this royal pair became the parents of Esau and Jacob.

Esau was the older of these two boys. To him belonged the coveted birthright, and hence preeminence over the other branches of the family. He was heir to the land of Canaan with all its sacred institutions. No other man living on the earth at that time had so sacred a heritage. No other person in that generation could have stood so near to God by reason of the fact that his birthright gave him the promise of being the ancestor of the Messiah, the "first born among many brethren." What a destiny was his! It was possible for him to become a second Abraham, another "father of the faithful." Such were the prospects of this fortunate man.

Besides all this he had an attractive personality. There was nothing sordid nor mean about him. He was free-handed, generous, brave and beloved by his father Isaac. Compared with his brother Jacob, he had everything in his favor and nothing against him.

And yet he failed! There was something lacking. He did not measure up to his possibilities because he did not appreciate his heritage. The advantages of his birthright did not appeal to him. The story of Abraham's faith and pilgrimage and friendship with God did not interest him. Instead of seeking angels for his companions, he spent his time with the sons and daughters of Heth. He lived only in the present and had no interest in his future destiny. No ideals or principles governed his life. His days were spent in hunting and his nights with heathen friends.

His birthright was no doubt for sale long before he sold it. Jacob knew this, and others must have known it also. No doubt his brother talked it over with him many times. A man does not sell a birthright at once. He sells it in his heart again and again before he makes the deal. It is as certain as anything can be that Esau was not taken unawares. He was ready to dispose of it.

We all know the details of the transaction. Esau came

home from the excitement and enjoyment of the chase, hungry, and ready to faint with fatigue. Jacob who spent most of his time in his field and tent was busy preparing his evening meal. Esau's eyes fell upon the broth, and the red lentil soup, ready to be served. The savor of it reenforced what he saw and he was ready to pay any price to gratify his appetite. "Feed me, I pray thee," he cried, "with that same red pottage; for I am faint."

Now Jacob, if he had been a true brother, would have told him to help himself. But instead of that he saw an opportunity to make a bargain and said: "Sell me this day thy birthright." Poor Esau thinking he was about to die yielded readily enough; for, as he truly said, if he died it would be of no use to him. So the bargain was made, and Esau with an oath transferred his birthright to Jacob. And in return he got his pottage of lentils, and bread, and something to drink, and when he was filled, went his way without the least apparent regret for what he had done. Possibly he thought he had made a good bargain.

If he ever felt any remorse, we have no record of it. It is not likely that he did, for soon after this he married two Hittite women, the very thing that God had warned Abraham against. Esau knew this, and had he cared at all to inherit God's blessings, he would have sought the counsel of his father and mother before taking this fatal step.

Years passed, and Isaac grew old. His eyes grew dim, and he had a premonition that he was about to die. So he called Esau to his side and asked him to prepare a meal of venison for him before he gave him the covenant blessings. He hastened to obey, thinking perhaps that by this simple act he might atone for all the years that he had despised his heritage.

When he returned he learned of the deception that had given the blessing to Jacob. Suddenly he awoke to the fact that he had suffered a great loss. And his despairing cry:

"Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father!" is most pathetic. But we cannot sympathize so very much with him. He had never cared for it before. Not once had he tried to recover the birthright from Jacob. There had been no sorrow nor remorse for his action. Even now there was no repentance. He was disappointed, and angry; that was all.

Esau had no blessing coming to him. He had forfeited all claim to his heritage. Even if Isaac had pronounced a blessing upon his head, it could have had no meaning. Even God cannot give us what we are not prepared to receive. Jacob did not steal anything from Esau. He had nothing to steal.

Esau had so many good qualities that his tragic fate awakens our deepest sympathy. But he loved material things more than the things of God, and was not the sort of man that God would choose to be the father of his chosen people. He was without religion or any desire to find God. He gave way to his passions and appetites and lived for himself alone. He set his affections on the things of this world and lost his soul.

What a lesson for us to ponder! There are Esaus in every school and in every community, who barter their inheritance as cheaply as Esau did. They live in the present and take no thought of the days to come. Religion has no meaning to them, and God is far from their thoughts. With no ideals, no plan, no purpose, they drift through life without guide or compass, and cry out when it is too late—"Hast thou but one blessing, O my father?"

---

*Bartering Life*

We barter life for pottage; sell true bliss
For wealth or power, for pleasure or renown;
Thus, Esau-like, our Father's blessings miss,
Then wash with fruitless tears our faded crown.

Our faded crown, despised and flung aside,
Shall on some brother's brow immortal bloom;
No partial hand the blessing may misguide,
No flattering fancy change our Monarch's doom.
—John Keble.

*Class Problems*

1. What advantages did Esau have by birth? By natural endowments?
2. Who were his parents? His four grandparents?
3. Relate the incidents connected with the loss of his birthright.
4. How does the Bible say he lost his blessing?
5. Who was responsible for these losses? Why?
6. Why did he blame Jacob?
7. What was the real reason for his failure?
8. Name Esau's good qualities. His faults.
9. What is the cause of most failures in life?

## Lesson 10

# JACOB, THE FUGITIVE

Lesson Text: Genesis 27:41-46; 28.

Song; Student Reading: Gen. 28:12-15; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Gen. 28:16-17.

Concert Prayer: O God, the Eternal Father, we come to thee in the days of our youth, seeking the fulfilment of the promises made to our fathers. Help us to be worthy of our heritage. Reveal unto us a "Bethel," a holy place, a sacred shrine, a house of God, where we may meet and talk with thee as Jacob did in the days of old. Give unto us also the comforting assurance that thou wilt never leave us in our hour of loneliness, nor forsake us when we are far from home and friends. Amen.

*Memory Text: I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.—Psalms* 121:1.

Explain: 27:41 Days of mourning. 44 A few days. 45 Of you both. 46 Daughters of Heth. 28:2 Padan-aram. 9 Unto Ishmael. 12 A ladder. 17 How dreadful is this place. 18 The stone. 19 Bethel. Luz.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Finding God*

Imagine, if you can, a tired, lonely man climbing a rocky hill. He walked on slabs of stone piled on top of one another to the very summit. As he began the ascent, the slabs looked like a great stairway. When he reached the top, he had a splendid view of a great inland sea to the east, and beyond this a long range of mountains behind which the sun was setting. It was too late for him to continue his journey, so he determined to remain there for the night.

The man was Jacob, the son of Isaac and Rebekah, and he was fleeing, not exactly from justice, but from the wrath of his brother Esau, who had threatened to kill him. Jacob had shamefully lied to his blind and aged father and secured the blessing which was intended for Esau. He realized now how great his sin had been, for he was alone with his conscience and remorse filled his soul.

His mother had advised him to go back to her old home

at Haran to her brother Laban, until his brother's fury was spent and then return. Neither of them imagined that they would ever meet again. The few days became years, and Rebekah was dead before her son returned. Generally we have to pay a high price for our sins. Jacob atoned in bitter tears and years of penance for the wrong he had committed.

This was perhaps the third night since he had left Beersheba, and he longed for the loved ones there. He had never been away from home before and now he is alone with himself, a wanderer on an untried journey. At this very hour his brother Esau would be wending his way homeward from the chase, and his father would be waiting to welcome him. His mother would be busy in the tent. His mother, whose love for him was dearer than her own soul, how could he do without her! Always before this separation, ever since he could remember, she had greeted him at the close of the day, and they had planned together his great destiny. But tonight no mother was near. He was alone, and only the memory of what she had been and done for him remained.

It is doubtful whether the declining sun ever withdrew its light from one more deep in gloom than Jacob was that night as he lay down on the hard ground to sleep. The canopy of heaven was his only roof, and a stone his pillow. His bed was hardness of the hardest form, not physical alone, but the realization that he had no home any more. His father's tent would never be safe for him again. It was not large enough for the two brothers. And since he was responsible, he must make the atonement in exile and suffering. His whole inheritance was the blessing that he had lied to receive, and the staff he carried.

Did Jacob pray that night? Did he think of God in that hour of deep despondency? It is likely that he did. With all his faults his soul hungered for God. He had faith in the promise made to Abraham, and longed for its fulfilment through his own lineage. The birthright was so

precious to him that he had cheated to obtain it, and the blessing of his father so greatly desired that he had deceived him to receive it. We cannot approve his methods in getting them, but we must certainly commend his appreciation of the promises made to his fathers. And God heard his prayer for we read:

"And he dreamed, and, behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and, behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth; and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

"And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

What a vivid description! The slabs of stone, over which he had dragged his weary feet the night before, became a glorious stairway reaching up to heaven, on which angels were ascending and descending, with the Lord at the summit. Wonderful sight! Celestial messengers coming and returning between heaven and earth, and God himself visible to Jacob. But more wonderful were the words he heard, "I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land." And more, the Lord promised him as he had promised Abraham, that in him and his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed.

What an assurance! What a destiny! Surely the man

who could behold such a vision and receive such a blessing from God was not as bad as many writers declare! Faults he had of course, but since God did not reprove or threaten him, it seems presumptuous for us to spend so much time in pointing out his defects of character. The man who could find God on a bleak and barren hill, and thus make the place a holy sanctuary through all generations, must have had a spiritual life deeper and finer than many of his critics have ever known.

And how grandly Jacob responded to the marvelous vision! While it overawed him, his whole nature was awakened to a high and holy purpose. He vowed a vow that Jehovah should be his God. He dedicated his life to a sacred ideal. His solemn vow of allegiance to the God of Abraham was not conditioned, as many have contended, upon his future prosperity. When he said, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go," he was simply reciting the promise already made. It might be rendered, "Inasmuch as, or, since God will be with me," etc. There was no doubt in his mind, since God had already promised to be with him. And he set up a stone as a memorial for all to see and know that in that place he had seen the living God.

And he never forgot the vision nor the inner resolution he had made. It was with him through all the long years at Haran, and the memory of it made him look forward to the time when he should return to the holy shrine, where he had vowed to serve and keep the commandments of God. And on his return he visited it again and again, and at last when he came to die in far-off Egypt, he reminded his son Joseph of the blessing he had received at Bethel.

Every one of us should seek for and find a "Bethel," where we may meet and commune with God. The place may differ for each of us. On the hill, in the grove, in our room at home, in our church—wherever we feel most reverent—there we may be sure that God is near us. There is his

house and there is the gate that leads to heaven, and there we may hear his voice.

---

*Lead, Kindly Light*

Lead, kindly Light, amid th' encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark and I am far from home;
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

—Rev. J. H. Newman.

*Class Problems*

1. How did Jacob secure the birthright?
2. What value did it have in those days?
3. Does anyone have a birthright today? What is it?
4. How did Jacob secure his father's blessing?
5. When his father learned that he had been deceived, why did he not change the blessing?
6. Why did Jacob leave home?
7. Relate his experience at Bethel.
8. What does his experience show in regard to his character?
9. Could Esau have had such a vision? Why?
10. How and where may we find a "Bethel"?

## Lesson 11

# ISRAEL, THE PRINCE OF GOD

Lesson Text: Genesis 32.

Song; Student Reading: Gen. 32:9-11; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Gen. 32:26-28.

Concert Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to struggle with our weaknesses and overcome them one by one as Jacob did. Give us strength to wrestle for the blessings that we may desire until we obtain them. Thou knowest our needs and the longings of our hearts. May we persist in our efforts to attain all that we desire to be and to accomplish in righteousness, that we may be worthy to have thy holy angels meet us by the way and welcome our return home from our earthly wanderings. Amen.

*Memory Text: And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.—Gen. 32:26.*

Explain: 1 Angels of God. 2 God's host. Mahanaim. 3 Land of Seir. 7 Two bands. 10 With my staff. 24 Wrestled a man. 26 The day breaketh. 28 Israel. As a prince hast thou power. 30 Peniel. 32 Sinew which shrank.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Wrestling for a Blessing*

Twenty years have passed in the life of Jacob since that night at Bethel—twenty years of struggle, of romance and of growth. He has traveled a long way since that dark day when he lied to his father and cheated his brother. His heart has been ripened and softened by eventful experiences, and by Rachel, who made the years seem only days to him because he loved her. But the greatest change has come because of Bethel, and the vow he made there. The constant memory of the ladder that reached to heaven, and the angels, and the voice of God which he heard there, has influenced his life as nothing else could have done. The covenant he made with God that day was sacred to him, and he was going back now to renew it.

He was not a poor wanderer now, going forth with only a staff on an unknown quest. God had been with him as he promised, and he was rich now in flocks and herds, in

goats and camels, and in material wealth of every kind. A large family returned with him, and so worthy was he that the angels of God met him on the border of Canaan to welcome him to the land of his inheritance. It seemed as if the days of his adversity were passed.

But the dark days of his life were not yet ended. No sooner had one danger passed when another threatened. He had just escaped the persecutions of his father-in-law Laban and been thrilled by the sight of that army of angels, when a terrible message came to him from his brother Esau. Jacob had sent messengers to notify his brother that he was coming, and to ask for a reconciliation. Now they returned with the information that Esau was coming to meet him with an armed force of four hundred men, probably with hostile intentions.

We read that Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed, as he might well be, for Esau had begun to live by the sword and had surrounded himself with a numerous body of followers. Jacob had no means of defending himself from an attack. All that he could do was to divide his company into two bands so that if one was smitten, the other might escape. All his sense of security was gone. He forgot about the angels' and God's promise of safety, and remembered only the wrong that he had committed against his brother. His life was stripped bare by his conscience. It is hard to have faith when the memory of a sin is troubling us.

In that hour of terror he prayed as he had never prayed before: "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac ..... I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant: for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children."

It is night, and Jacob has sent his company on ahead.

He has entrusted all he has to God, and is left alone by the brook Jabbok, at a spot still pointed out to the traveler. Here a strange and mysterious being, having the form of a man, wrestles with him until the breaking of the day. When the "man" saw that he prevailed not, he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh and put it out of joint. He confesses himself vanquished, but Jacob refuses to let him go until he receives a blessing. This is granted and his name is changed to Israel in commemoration of his power with God and prevailing with men. His unknown antagonist refuses to tell his name, but is first called a man, then an angel, and then God. When the conquest is over Jacob declares, "I have seen God face to face."

This was an epoch in Jacob's life. It is impossible to come out of such a struggle without a change of character, and Jacob was changed. He stepped upon a higher level than he had ever attained before—the level of Israel, the Prince. What a daring thing he did that night, to challenge the request of his heavenly antagonist! His strength was spent, his hip was out of joint, and he was in mortal pain, but still he would not surrender. In an agony of determination he flung his arms around the Angel, and would not let him go until he had blessed him. Such persistence is irresistible even by God himself.

We can understand now why Jacob was counted worthy to be the founder of that great people whose intense clinging to life has kept them a power in the world through nearly forty centuries. Conquered, crushed, scattered, their land despoiled, the Jews have never perished.

Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, mighty world empires, all conquered the descendants of Jacob in turn, but they have long since perished, while Israel is still a people. How could they die with such an ancestor? How could they give up their mission and destiny in the world when they remembered Jacob's unfailing perseverance which would not let go his purpose, but held on

hour after hour through that long night until he finally won?

The lesson to us also is clear, if we would have power with God. Despite his love for us, he will not be moved except by persistent importunity. Most of our prayers are perfunctory and worthless. They never reach God at all. Jesus spent long hours in prayer. Night after night on the lonely mountain side he too wrestled with God and prevailed. Through prayer all things are possible, but unless our petitions are the outpourings of hearts in urgent need of help and comfort, they become mechanical and worthless. Cheap prayers are an insult to deity. It is hollow mockery to pretend to pray without a feeling of dependence. It is nothing short of blasphemy to trifle with the most sacred relationship between God and man. It is taking his name in vain to approach him in hypocrisy and insincerity, and call it prayer. "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire," persistently and continuously offered to God, and nothing short of that will move heaven in our behalf. We must cling and cling as Jacob did, until we receive the blessing.

Jacob's life is an outstanding example of what a great ideal may do to transform a character. It is a long call from the crafty scheming brother who fled from his home to escape the brother that he had wronged, to Israel the Prince, whose dying words were an exalted prophecy of the coming Conquerer of death, whose dominion should be an everlasting dominion. Jesus was clearly foreshadowed in the blessing which he bestowed upon his fourth son: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come."

Such a life is an inspiration. It clearly reveals how a character beset with sins and weaknesses may be transformed into a saint of God. In the beginning, we wonder how a man like Jacob should be selected in preference to the good-natured, generous-hearted Esau. Our sympathy is wholly with the older brother at first. But we soon discover that he was a mere drifter, without the least appreciation of

his heritage. It is really pathetic the way he squandered his life. While Jacob through all the troubled years of his eventful life never lost sight of his goal, he had many discouragements to meet and obstacles to overcome. As he said to Pharaoh, "Evil have the days of the years of my life been." This was literally true. A dark cloud seemed to follow him all the years of his life. First, the breaking up of his home and the separation from his father and mother; then the cruel treachery of Laban; next the heartbreaking loss of his beloved Rachel; after that, the quarrels and scandals of his family; the loss of Joseph; then the famine and the mourning for Benjamin. But through all these afflictions, he emerges one of the greatest heroes of the faith, a prince who dared all things to attain his ends, even to a personal encounter with God himself.

---

*Prayer*

More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so, the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

—Tennyson.

*Class Problems*

1. How did Jacob come to leave Laban?
2. In what way had Jacob's character changed since that night at Bethel?
3. Why was he afraid of Esau when God had promised him safety?
4. Mention the things he did to appease Esau's wrath.
5. What was the substance of his prayer?

6. What in your judgment was the nature of the wrestle he had?
7. What effect did it have on his character?
8. What is the meaning of this statement: "If there had been no Bethel, there could have been no Peniel?" Why?
9. What is said about prayer in this lesson?
10. Can we have a Peniel as well as a Bethel? How?

Joseph kept the 10 Comdts. at a time when there were no 10 Comdts.

See thy a man diligent in his busin

Memory Gem and Aim.—"God prepares an opportunity for every man who prepared him

1. Soft hearted and soft hearte

2. Hard " " hard "—Ba

3. Soft " " " "—Cri

4. Hard " " soft "—Je

1. Why love Benjamin?

Price of Jesus and Joseph.

Joseph the original Herbert Hoover

" " " Alexander Hamilton

" " " George Washingto

" " " Abraham Lincoln

" " " Daniel Webster

LESSON 12

# JOSEPH, THE DREAMER

Lesson Text: Genesis 37.

Song; Student Reading: Psalms 1:1-3; **Prayer by Student;** Concert Reading: Psalms 3:1-3.

Concert Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, we come before thee today with a fervent desire in our hearts to do some great work in the world for thy glory and the salvation of men. Give unto us the high ideals and dreams which Joseph cherished in the days of his youth. We would be like him in thought and word and deed, that our names like his may be held in everlasting honor. Help us to this end, we humbly pray. Amen.

*Memory Text: Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.—Prov. 27:1.*

Explain: 3 The son of his old age. 9 The eleven stars. 11 But his father observed the saying. 12 Shechem. 19 This dreamer. 23 They stripped Joseph of his coat. 24 Into a pit. 25 Ishmaelites. 28 Twenty pieces of silver. 34 Sackcloth. 36 Potiphar. Midianites.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *"Dream On, O Youth"*

And now we come to Joseph, the most thrilling life in the history of Israel. No other Old Testament character grips our interest as does his. He was the son of Jacob and his beloved Rachel, for whom he had so faithfully served Laban for fourteen years. From the very first the boy charms and fascinates us. We can easily understand why Jacob lavished the fulness of his affection on the motherless boy, for he saw in him the image of the dead mother. It would be impossible for Joseph not to be his father's favorite, especially when he compared his character with that of his ten older brothers.

Joseph had been condemned because "he brought unto his father their evil report" of two of his brothers. But it is best for us to withhold our judgment, since we do not know what he reported. It is quite likely that he saw and heard things when he was with them that ought to be told. There is wickedness that should not be concealed. Joseph's conduct

may not have been tale-bearing, but a filial, confidential report to his father. Whatever it was, it made him very unpopular with the brothers. This is always the case. No one is popular who calls attention to the sins of others.

Matters were made worse by his two dreams. He told them innocently enough, without any thought of the consequences to himself. The first showed that his brethren were to be in subjection to him, and the second that he would have even a wider dominion—his father, his mother and his brethren bowing down before him to the earth. Of course, it was unwise for Joseph so boldly to declare his dreams to those who were so intimately concerned. But the very simplicity with which he related them should have excused him. He was but a child, and his brothers were mature men. They could easily have laughed it off as a joke. But instead of that, their anger knew no bounds. It must have been that they had a dread suspicion that the dreams might have some prophetic import. At any rate, their envy was such that they planned to put him out of the way. It is hard for men to submit to the decrees of Providence. The spirit of ill-will and hatred which Joseph's brothers showed towards him was like that of Cain towards Abel, Ishmael towards Isaac, Esau towards Jacob, and the Scribes and Pharisees towards Christ.

One other grievance the brothers had against Joseph. His father had unwisely given him a garment of special distinction. It was meant as a badge of superiority for Joseph as the heir of the birthright. He may have been worthy of this honor in every way; indeed from what we afterward learn of him, it is certain that he was, but it was very unwise for Jacob to show such partiality. He should have remembered his experience in his own home. The sight of that garment was poison to the older brothers.

Matters soon came to a crisis. Jacob at this time was living at Hebron, but he had land at Shechem, more than fifty miles to the north. Here his sons cared for the cattle.

45 miles north.

THE SELLING OF JOSEPH

It was natural that Jacob should desire to hear from them, and he sent Joseph to find out if all was well with them. Joseph readily undertook the long journey, expecting no evil. Apparently he had not the slightest suspicion of his brothers' hatred toward him, and it seems that the father was equally unsuspecting. When he reached Shechem, he learned that they had taken their herds to Dothan, twelve miles farther north. The fact that he went on till he found them is evidence of his dependability. He would not return to his father until he had accomplished his task. As he neared his destination we read:

"And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now, therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit; and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams."

This gives us some idea of the character of Jacob's sons at this time. Whatever Joseph's offense may have been, such hatred was without warrant or reason. Think of nine men planning together to kill a boy seventeen years old, who never even knew that he had wronged them. It is easy by means of our imagination to get a realistic picture of the scene. Joseph glad that he has found them after his long search, and running smilingly forward to greet them; then for the first time he observes on their stern countenances a look of anger that he had never seen before. He hears Reuben plead his cause; but the others are unmoved. With a sickening fear he discovers that his life is in danger, and he trembles for his safety. Suddenly they seize him and strip off his precious coat which is partly the cause of his trouble. Before he has time to realize the meaning of it all, he is tumbled into a deep pit or cistern. A vague fear now takes possession of him. Can it be possible that they mean his death? Long hours pass and he has about given up hope, when a rope is lowered and he is drawn to the surface. He

sees the faces of strange men. No one speaks to him, but he is sure that something dreadful is about to happen. He pleads with them to let him return to his father. But no attention is paid to what he says. Finally he hears the clank of money; then his hands are manacled, and he is led away, without another word from his brothers.

Already tired from his long journey, he is yet compelled to trudge many long miles beside the men before night comes and he is permitted to sleep. His new masters are Ishmaelites, and they are on their way to Egypt with spicery to sell in that land, and there too, he will be sold as a slave. He does not know that, however, as he lies down to rest. He still hopes to return to his father. But the next day they go on, and many days they travel farther and farther from his home, until at last he realizes the awful truth—he is a slave.

Not much chance now that his brothers will ever bow down to him or honor him, for what chance does a slave have to rise in the world? And yet he does not forget his dream; he will live and act as if he were going to be a ruler. He will cherish the ideal which his dream has given him. Even a slave can be a leader. With these thoughts in his mind, the deep depression which crushed him at first wears away. He becomes cheerful and shows a willingness to help his new masters, that surprises them. They discover that they have secured a real prize, and drive a hard bargain with Potiphar for him when they reach Egypt. And this captain of the king's guard soon discovers that he too has made a wonderful bargain in securing the services of a young man like Joseph.

---

*Dark Days*

The way at times may dark and dreary seem,
No ray of sunshine on our path may beam;
The dark clouds hover o'er us like a pall,
And gloom and sadness seem to compass all.

But still with honest purpose toil we on,
And if our steps be upright, straight and true,
Far in the East a golden light shall dawn,
And the bright smile of God come bursting through.

—Author Unknown.

*Class Problems*

1. Give three reasons why Joseph was his father's favorite.
2. Give three reasons why Joseph's brothers hated him.
3. Should Joseph have brought an evil report of his brothers to his father? Give reasons.
4. If a window is broken in a school house, and a pupil knows who did it, should he tell the principal? Give reasons.
5. Was Jacob justified in making Joseph his favorite? Give reasons.
6. Do you think Joseph's dreams were divine intimations, or just in line with what he was thinking?
7. What did Joseph's brothers do to make their father believe that he was killed?
8. Who suggested selling Joseph? What reason did he give?
9. What value is there to such dreams as Joseph had?
10. Name the sons of Jacob.

LESSON 13

# JOSEPH, THE SLAVE

Lesson Text: Genesis 39 and 40.

Song; Student Reading: Gen. 39:21-23; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Gen. 40:14-15.

Concert Prayer: O God, the Eternal Father, create in us clean hearts and clean hands. In the hour of temptation, make us strong to resist the allurements that would lead us to destruction. May our delight be in the law of the Lord and in keeping his commandments. We live in a world where sin clothes itself in attractive forms, and vice abides in the habitations of those who are honored of men. Give us the gift of discernment that we may seek out and associate only with the pure in heart. Amen.

*Memory Text: How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?—Genesis* 39:9.

Explain: 1 Pharaoh. 6 Knew not ought he had. 14 An Hebrew. 40:1 Butler. Baker. 8 Do not interpretations? 16 White baskets. 17 Bakemeats. 19 Hang thee on a tree. The birds shall eat.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Light Within*

Joseph's brothers were certain that they were rid of him forever. And to all human appearances their judgment was correct. He came to Egypt a slave, a chattel, a piece of personal property, to be sold in the slave market to the highest bidder. But even so, he brought something with him that compensated for all his handicaps—his dream. No one could sell that, no one could buy it. Slave, or heir to a vast inheritance, a bondman, or the favorite child of one who had "talked with God face to face," made little difference to Joseph; he still dreamed of a vast dominion over which he would one day rule. The potency of that dream was evidenced immediately in the way he reacted to his new environment. He spent no time in vain regrets or in grieving over his wrongs. His disposition was not soured. The darkness through which he had come was forgotten, and he looked forward to the light ahead. He did not become morbid, sullen or discouraged, but on the contrary, accepted his

position with cheerfulness, and entered so heartily into his new life, that Potiphar soon made him the overseer of all that he had. In a few years it looked as if he was on the road to liberty and distinction.

And now we come to a new crisis in his life, a trial more severe than any he yet encountered. His master's wife became infatuated with him, and did not hesitate to make her feelings known. It is hard to imagine a more trying situation for Joseph. He was young and subject to the passions of all men. Not only this, but he was placed in circumstances where it was very easy for him to relax morally. He was a slave in a country where moral standards were extremely low. He was hopelessly separated from his home, with no prospect of ever returning. In addition to this, he had suffered great cruelty and injustice from the members of his family, enough to embitter his spirit for all time. Why should he have any moral scruples when all the people around him had none?

Then, too, he could plead that if he yielded to sin, he would gain the favor and support of Potiphar's wife to aid him in gaining his freedom. Surely, she would see to it that no harm came to him from his master. While if he refused it might mean irretrievable disgrace, perhaps even his death. If ever a man was justified in yielding to a temptation, Joseph was that man. Surely to comply with her wishes in such an extremity was the only way out of this difficulty.

But in spite of all these inducements, Joseph did not yield. What held him back? Was it the memory of his mother's counsel, or the holy covenant which his father had made with God for himself and for his children? We do not know, but somehow, there had come into the life of this choice young man certain fixed principles by which he governed his actions. This being so, he did not allow his youth, or the fact that he was far from home, or the danger of death to blind him to the real nature of the infatuated wom-

an's proposal. He did not try to mitigate the sin, as many do, by giving it a milder name. To his everlasting honor be it said he had the courage day after day to resist the temptation. What supreme daring it was to say to one who held the power of life and death over him: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" That sentence should be written deep in the heart and life of every boy and girl. No braver words were ever spoken. No truer statement was ever made; for it would have been a sin, not only against Potiphar, but against God. Indeed, we may say that all sin is against God, no matter what its nature may be.

But it cost Joseph dear; for when the woman found that she could not move him, and that all her blandishments were vain, her pretended affection turned to bitter hatred, and she boldly accused him of the very sin that she had asked him to commit. The result was chains and a dungeon. Joseph had to suffer disgrace and imprisonment for the noblest deed of his life. But harder for him to bear than the confinement was the realization that the master who had so generously trusted him believed that he had basely betrayed that trust.

Well might Joseph now decide that God had forgotten him. No sooner did he rise above one calamity than another came to take its place. With apparent justification he might say: "What is the use of all my strivings; the harder I try to do right, the greater becomes my misfortunes!" But he did not say that, for he took his dream and his God with him even into the Egyptian dungeon. Nothing could affect his optimism and good nature. His spirit was unbroken, and the darkness of his cell was not permitted to enter his heart. Just as he had been the best of slaves, so now he became the best of prisoners. In fact it was not long before the keeper of the prison trusted him more fully even than Potiphar had done, for he gave into his keeping the other prisoners for whom he was responsible with his life.

Joseph, tried to the uttermost, never lost his faith in God. He had the spirit of Job when that suffering saint exclaimed: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Such a man is invincible. His faith and character are beyond the power of his enemies to destroy. Through good and through evil report, through prosperity and through the deepest affliction and humiliation, he moves triumphantly to his appointed goal. He absolutely refused to become discouraged or depressed. In this respect he was far superior to his father Jacob, who cried out in his despair, "I will go down to my grave mourning." Joseph was above such weakness. He never despaired, never lost heart. His spirit remained unbroken under the most galling and crushing adversity.

Better still, he never harbored vindictiveness, or schemed to get revenge on those who had wronged him. His cruel brothers who had so grossly injured him were safe from any attempt on his part to get even with them. Potiphar's wife, who was the cause of his unjust imprisonment, never suffered at the hands of her innocent victim. Joseph had no time to spend in seeking revenge. Serene, confident, even cheerful, he looked forward to his final vindication, and the fulfilment of his dream with a faith that never faltered.

Years came and went, and he was still in prison, when lo, a miracle came to pass and he was free. It was his kindness to a fellow prisoner two years before which brought to him his great opportunity. Two servants of the king, his butler and his baker, had incurred the monarch's anger, and they were thrown into the prison where Joseph was confined. It did not take much evidence in those days to condemn men. Joseph immediately became their friend. One morning he found them in great distress because of their dreams during the night, and no one to interpret them. Joseph reminded them that interpretation came from God. When they had related their dreams, he told them what they signified. The butler was to be restored to his former position while the baker would be put to death. Then Joseph asked the butler

to remember him to the king, for he had done nothing for which he should be put in a dungeon. Things turned out as Joseph had predicted, but the butler forgot his promise to remember his prison friend. It was brought to his remembrance in a most striking manner. Pharaoh himself had a dream and no one could interpret it, until the butler called to mind his own dream and the man who told him its meaning.

---

*Unfaltering Trust*

I like the man who faces what he must,
With step triumphant and a heart of cheer;
Who fights the daily battles without fear,
Sees his hopes fade, yet keeps unfaltering trust
That God is God, that somehow true and just,
His plans work out for mortals, not a tear
Is shed, when fortune which the world holds dear
Falls from his grasp; better with love a crust
Than living in dishonor; envies not, nor loses faith
In man; but with a smile and words of hope
Gives zest to every toiler. He alone is great
Who by a life heroic, conquers fate.

—Author Unknown.

*Class Problems*

1. Many writers contend that Joseph was a spoiled child at home. Do you think that is true? Give reasons.
2. How does this lesson help you answer the first problem?
3. How do you account for the fact that Joseph responded so willingly and cheerfully to his new environment?
4. What reasons did his brothers have for thinking that they would never see him again?
5. What reasons were there for Joseph's yielding to

the temptation that came to him? What reasons against his yielding?

6. Could a man without faith and certain fixed principles of life to guide him have passed successfully through such a trial? Why?
7. What is the outstanding characteristic of Joseph as a slave? Prisoner?
8. What great lesson do we learn from his experience with the butler?
9. Should we do right in the hope of being rewarded as Joseph was? Why?

Repeat some red dreams (figurat[illegible] speaking)!! To be the absolute master [illegible] mistress of her slave. 2. She dreamed of not only mastering his soul and body as a slave, b[illegible] of mastering his passions and of winning his love. She had dreams of simple pleasure & adventure; of a wild, passionate romance. Joseph had his own sacred, high dreams. No one could master them. No one could buy them! No one could sell them!

Lesson 14

# JOSEPH, THE RULER

Lesson Text: Genesis 41 and 42.

Song; Student Reading: Gen. 41:39-43; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Psalms 24:1-4.

Concert Prayer: Gracious Father, in the name of thy Son, we come into thy presence this day in prayer and worship. May thy Holy Spirit guide our thoughts and words during this recitation. We thank thee for our contact with such lives as Joseph's, whose moral integrity has been a light to thy children through all the ages. Help us to emulate his life, that we may walk in holiness before thee, we humbly pray. Amen.

*Memory Text: And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth.* —*Gen.* 42:6.

Explain: 1 The river. 2 Meadow. Well favoured kine. 3 Ill favoured. 5 Seven ears....upon one stalk. 6 The east wind. 8 Magicians. 14 He shaved himself. 25 The dream....is one. 42 Ring.. ..vestures....chain. 43 They cried. 45 Zaphnaph-paaneah. Asenath. 51 Manasseh. 52 Ephraim. 56 Over all the face of the earth. 42:1 When Jacob saw. 9 Ye are spies. The nakedness of the land. 11 One man's sons. 13 Is not. 15 Life of Pharaoh. 18 I fear God.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Up From A Dungeon*

Joseph awoke one morning in prison, just as he had done for more than a thousand mornings now, with no prospect of any change in his fortunes. It was the same routine over and over again. We who are privileged to go where we please and return when we desire, cannot realize the dull monotonous life of a convict. By this time Joseph must have felt it keenly. Thirteen years had passed since he was torn from his home in Canaan and sold into slavery, and during that time he had never been free a day. First, a servant in the house of Potiphar, and now for years a prisoner in a loathsome dungeon, and all the time innocent of any offense. There must have been days when his patience was nearly exhausted, when his faith wavered, when he cried: "O God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of my father Jacob,

how long must I endure this terrible affliction? When may I look for my deliverance? When shall my dream come true?"

So he felt on this eventful morning as he arose from the crude cot that had been his bed for years. He who had never wavered in his optimism, who had remained cheerful under the most trying circumstances, was on the verge of giving way to despondency. While he is thus brooding over his sad lot, he hears his name called. A messenger has come with an order from the king. Joseph is summoned to appear before the great Pharaoh. Hurriedly he is brought out of the dungeon, and we read: "He shaved himself, and changed his raiment." This was necessary so that he might be ceremonially clean in the royal presence. Soon he stood before the ruler of the Egyptian empire, calm, dignified and unafraid. No one would have recognized the clean-shaven, handsome young man who graced the throne room as the long-bearded, unkempt prisoner of a few hours before.

The king has had a dream and he is greatly troubled, for the wisest men in Egypt cannot interpret it. He spoke to Joseph: "I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it." And Joseph answered: "It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." Notice how careful he was to give God the credit; but notice also his faith. There is no doubt in his mind of the outcome. Before ever the dream has been told, he has promised Pharaoh to make known its meaning.

And so it came about that he not only interpreted the dream, but made bold to advise Pharaoh how the threatened famine might be provided against in Egypt. It was a daring thing for one in Joseph's position to do, but the despotic monarch took kindly to the advice, and at once elevated Joseph to the highest position in the kingdom next to the throne, and gave him unlimited authority and assistance to carry out whatever measures he thought necessary for the safety of the kingdom.

Could anything be more dramatic than the sudden change in Joseph's fortunes? In a single day he leaped from a dungeon to a throne. Nothing like it has ever happened in this world before or since. And the striking thing about it was he was prepared for the change. He had actually qualified for a throne in a house of bondage and a dungeon. Those who complain about their lack of opportunities should read the story of Joseph, and ponder the splendor that came out of a dungeon.

It is doubtful whether many of the Egyptians had much faith in Joseph's prediction of a famine at the end of seven years. The land is filled with plenty; it is hard to imagine a time of famine. We are all naturally extravagant and inclined to waste our substance when there is no scarcity. The world is full of prodigal sons, so far as spending is concerned. Joseph demonstrated the value of saving the surplus that was going to waste. He saved a nation by economy.

During those seven prosperous years he must have been a busy man. Houses had to be built, contracts made, transportation provided, and perhaps even force used to compel the farmers to reach the limit of production. No doubt at times his authority was tested to the limit. But he must have had a genius for organization. At any rate, the perfect success of his plans demonstrated his wonderful capacity for getting results. It is quite likely that many in those days of unbounded prosperity looked upon him as a visionary dreamer. What was the use of all this economy in a fertile land like Egypt? But they lived to see his dream come true, and his policy vindicated.

Joseph's vast undertakings of economy required a great deal of tact and unlimited patience. He was carrying out his policy on the sole conviction that his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream was correct. Others might doubt, but he never wavered in his faith that the famine would come. He had learned to wait. For thirteen years he had waited pa-

tiently for the fulfilment of his own dream. And so now with patience and forbearance with those who criticized his policy, he carried on, until, like Noah, he was ready for the coming catastrophe.

The famine came as he had predicted. The dreamer, the slave, the long imprisoned, is now the greatest man in the land of Egypt. Joseph is vindicated in the eyes of all the people. No one questions his judgment or his authority anymore. He is looked upon as the savior of the land and all people bow down to him as if he were a god.

The distressing famine reached into other lands, even to far-off Canaan, where an old man and his eleven sons resided. In two years they had used up their surplus and were sorely pressed for food. Word came to the aged Patriarch that corn had been stored in Egypt, and he sent his sons to that land to buy a supply for their pressing needs. All the sons, except Benjamin the youngest, went their way, and in due time reached the land of Egypt.

It would be interesting if we knew their thoughts and conversation on this eventful journey. Did they think and talk of Joseph? Did they hear again his cries for mercy, and his pitiful pleadings that they would return him to their father? Did they see the anguish in his face and the tears that filled his eyes when they took the money for him? Did they call to mind how he struggled to free himself from the slave-dealers who bought him? Did they remember the heart-breaking cry of their father when they brought to him the blood-stained coat, which they had prepared to deceive him? Who can doubt it? Remorse, bitter unavailing remorse must have filled their souls. Somewhere in this land their young brother had fallen a victim to a cruel taskmaster, but they had been his murderers.

And now they are standing in the presence of the great ruler of Egypt, whose far-sighted statesmanship had saved the land from starvation. He recognizes them at once. There they are, the same group that had planned to kill him

twenty years before, and on second thought had thrown him into the pit, and finally sold him into slavery. He looks at each of them, and they tremble at his piercing glance. There is Simeon who contended so vehemently for his death, and Dan and Naphtali and Gad and Asher, all of whom hated him so bitterly. Yes, he knew them all, but of course they did not recognize the great governor of Egypt, as the young brother whom they had so cruelly wronged. His stern look has disconcerted them, and they come forward with a strange fear in their hearts. Then they fall on their knees before him, as a token of their unworthiness to stand in his presence, and Joseph remembered his dream.

---

*Ever Climbing*

The heights by great men reached and kept,
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.
Standing on what too long we bore
With shoulders bent and downcast eyes,
We may discern—unseen before,
A path to higher destinies.

—Longfellow.

*Class Problems*

1. Are we to conclude from this lesson that God always rewards with high honors the man who does right? Give examples to support your answer.
2. How do you account for the fact that the butler forgot his promise?
3. Why do people not attach much importance to dreams nowadays?
4. What is meant by the statement: "Dream on, O youth, dream nobly and well, and thy dreams shall become thy prophets?" Give examples.

5. List and discuss each element in the character of Joseph that made for his great success.
6. How do you account for the fact that Joseph could successfully govern a great empire without previous experience?

ill forgive", etc.

1

LESSON 15

## JOSEPH, THE FORGIVING BROTHER

Lesson Text: Genesis 44; 45:1-15.

Song; Student Reading: Gen. 44:30-34; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Matt. 18:15.

Concert Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors. May we ever remember the words that fell from the lips of thy dying Son—"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Help us to realize that only as we forgive can we make certain of our own forgiveness. May we catch the forgiving spirit of the great ruler of Egypt, who turned his back on the cruel past, and bade his erring brethren walk with him in newness of life. Amen.

*Memory Text: Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.* —*Matt.* 18:21-22.

Explain: 44:2 Put my cup....in the sack's mouth of the youngest. 5 Whereby indeed he divineth? 32 Became surety. 45:6 Earing. 8 A father to Pharaoh. 10 The land of Goshen. 11 Nourish thee.

### THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

#### *A Lesson from a Throne*

The brothers evidently did not make a good impression on the governor of Egypt, for he accused them of being spies and treated them with a haughty and heartless indifference. Of course they protested their innocence, but apparently failed to make any impression on the stern ruler. With great fear in their hearts they told him who they were, where they came from, and all about their father and youngest brother. He seemed to doubt their story and demanded that they bring Benjamin with them when they returned as a proof of their honesty. Then he further increased their anxiety and fear by taking Simeon and putting him in prison. No doubt Simeon's voice had been loudest for murder at Dothan.

The men knew they were innocent of Joseph's accusation, and yet they felt guilty. It was the memory of their

great sin against him. Remorse is eating at their hearts, and they feel some judgment is about to overtake them. Joseph is trying them, putting them through a severe test. Before he reveals himself, he must know what kind of men they are. Have they changed since that day when they said: "Come now, therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit * * * and we shall see what will become of his dreams?" Will they speak up for Benjamin, or permit their father to be bereaved of him also? That was what Joseph wanted to know, and the reason why he was making it so hard for them.

We pass the heart-breaking scene of Jacob's parting with Benjamin. Great fear grips the hearts of all, fear of meeting the stern ruler again, fear that he will keep Benjamin, and so break their father's heart; fears for the fate of Simeon; fears for their own safety. But they must have food, and so they return to Egypt with their younger brother, and with the money which they had found in their sacks, with a strange presentiment of disaster weighing upon their hearts.

Once more they stand in the presence of the great ruler. Again they bow before him in token of their humility and reverence for his authority. And much to their surprise, they are well received. Simeon is returned to them unharmed, and the governor takes special notice of Benjamin. Then they are all invited to his house to dine, and shown every consideration and kindness. It all seems too good to be true. But still they cannot get rid of a haunting fear. They feel that something is coming, some impending tragedy.

But, the next morning when their sacks were filled and they were all sent on their journey, it looked as if their fears were groundless. They had not gone far, however, when they were overtaken by Joseph's steward who accused them of stealing his master's cup. At first they did not take the accusation seriously, for they knew that a mistake

had been made. Boldly they declared their innocence, and even dared to say: "With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my lord's bondmen."

With great good will they took down their sacks and opened them, as if to challenge the man to find the cup if he could. Well, he did. "He searched, and began at the eldest, and left at the youngest; *and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.*" The blow had fallen; the very thing they dreaded had come to pass. Hurriedly they returned to Joseph's house, and "fell before him on the ground."

Judah is their spokesman: "What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord's servants, both we, and he also with whom the cup is found." Joseph is touched by this confession and willingness to pay the penalty on the part of the brethren, and he makes a counter offer: "The man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant. The rest may go in peace to their father."

This was the crisis. Judah comes nearer to Joseph and makes his great plea for Benjamin. He rejects Joseph's offer to go home without his brother. Boldly, passionately and eloquently, he pleads that he may take his place. The life of his father is bound up with Benjamin; only let him return with his brethren and he will remain a bondman in his stead. Judah's appeal had a tremendous effect on Joseph. He saw now that this was not the Judah who had proposed his sale to the Ishmaelites. These brothers were not the men who had turned deaf ears to his cries twenty years before. Judah had many faults, but we can forgive them all for this noble plea for his father's happiness and Benjamin's liberty. When one is willing to give his life for another, he reaches the heights.

Joseph could restrain himself no longer. He had hid his true self behind a harsh and cruel exterior, but now his

heart's love broke forth like a flood to overwhelm his brethren with kindness. Bidding all his attendants retire, he was alone with his brethren. It was a tense moment. Would the verdict be condemnation or pardon? They were prepared for almost anything except what happened. "I am Joseph." The great ruler had spoken to them in their own language. Let us try to imagine the effect of these words upon his brethren. Had the earth opened to receive them they could not have been more staggered and amazed. Remembering that they had all but murdered him, had cruelly borne him from his home, had sold him for twenty pieces of silver and gone to his father with a cowardly lie; and seeing him now the governor of a mighty nation, with power of life and death in his hands, they were overwhelmed with terror and remorse.

They "could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you." And they came near, and he said, "I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you, to preserve life."

What a delicate way this was of assuring them of his forgiveness. He wanted them to forget what they had done to him, and to induce them to forgive themselves for the great crime they had committed. What a man Joseph was! In that far-off age when hatred and revenge ruled the world, Joseph taught the beauty of forgiveness. He anticipated the teachings of Christ two thousand years.

Not only did he freely and fully forgive his brethren, but he saved them and their families from starvation. He sent them post haste for their father, their wives and children, their flocks and herds, to come and make their home in Egypt. And when they came he fully identified his life with theirs. He was the ruler of Egypt, but at heart he was still a Hebrew, with the faith of his fathers, and the aspi-

rations which they had of a mighty destiny for the chosen people of God. Egypt was not his home, and on his death-bed he begged that his bones might be taken back to Canaan, when the children of Israel should return to the land which God gave to Abraham and his children forever.

---

*Mercy*

The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath; it is twice blest,
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes;
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown.
It is an attribute of God himself.

—Shakespeare.

*Class Problems*

1. What good proof did the men have that they were not spies?
2. Why do you think that Joseph selected Simeon as his prisoner? Why ask for Benjamin to be brought down?
3. Was Joseph justified in the harsh measures he adopted toward his brethren?
4. Why did his brethren have such great fear when they knew that they were innocent?
5. Why did Joseph select Benjamin's sack to conceal his cup, since he had nothing against Benjamin?
6. What were the main points in Judah's plea?
7. What effect did it have on Joseph?
8. Tell the parable of the Unmerciful Servant.

LESSON 16 Desert

# MOSES IN THE DESERT

Lesson Text: Exodus 3:1-15; 4:10-16.

Song; Student Reading: Exodus 2:5-9; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Exodus 4:11-12.

Concert Prayer: Righteous and loving Father, in this hurrying world, help us to see the need of pause and meditation, that we may be refreshed from eternal fountains. As Moses was sent to deliver Israel from bondage, so send us forth to men and women burdened with care, to the sad and the broken-hearted. Make us ministers of mercy to those who struggle in the bondage of sin, that we may lead them to freedom and to thee. These blessings we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.—Hebrews* 11:27.

Explain: Ex. 3:1 Horeb. 2 Angel of the Lord. In a flame of fire. 6 Moses hid his face. 8 Flowing with milk and honey. 12 I will be with thee. A token. 13 What is his name? 15 My memorial.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Growth by Meditation*

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

In these words the author of Hebrews extols the faith and loyalty to his people of the great lawgiver of Israel. But for a long time there was no evidence that he intended to follow up in deeds his renunciation of the Egyptian throne. He sympathized with his people in their affliction but did nothing to relieve it. It looked as if he was wasting time. To the modern view, he should have been "up and doing" immediately. But we do not understand God's way of doing things. Moses was not ready. He needed those long years at Midian to prepare himself for his great work.

In this generation we are in too much of a hurry. We do not appreciate the value of time and meditation as factors

in our spiritual and mental development. We have no time to wait and think. "Do it now," is our motto. But Jesus cautioned his disciples to "watch and wait." It will be remembered that he spent thirty years in obscurity. Today men would call those years wasted, but during that time he was pondering the scriptures and searching out their hidden meaning; he was gathering precious truths for his brilliant ministry of only three years. The sources from which he drew the materials for his matchless parables and vivid illustrations came from his experiences and meditations during those priceless hidden years. Even after his active work began, he spent half his time in reflection and prayer. In fact, thirty-five days comprise the entire recorded activity of his life. The same was true of Paul. He saw a light and the person of the risen Christ, heard his voice and spoke to him. Of course, he was anxious to bear witness of what he had seen and heard at once. But instead he was sent into Arabia for three years to meditate on the meaning of his vision. After that he went to his home town of Tarsus, where he remained in seclusion for nine years longer before he was ready for his great mission.

So it was with Moses. All those years as a shepherd on the plains and deserts of Midian were needed to enlarge his religious views and transform him from a man of the world to a man of God. He must be changed from a mere pensioner on the king's bounty into a great spiritual leader, independent, fearless and capable to the highest degree. At first it seemed a sad come-down from the palaces of royalty to the black tent of the shepherd; from the shaded orchards, playing fountains and rich food of kings, to barren windswept plains, with nothing to eat but dried dates and the coarse black bread of the desert. But this was what Moses needed to wean him from his old life and religion, and plant in his heart a new faith and a new ideal and purpose. In Egypt he had been trained as a soldier, a leader in war, a champion on the battlefield. On the desert, he walked with

the tired sheep, and learned patience and forbearance and sympathy. Day after day he led his flock in the most fertile places, searching out the shade for them, protecting them from wild animals, and caring for the helpless lamb as tenderly as the "good Shepherd" did fifteen hundred years later. And all the time he was communing with God and learning the secrets of heaven.

Years came and went, and Moses still remained on the desert. He sympathized with his people and longed for the time to come when they should be free, but remained with his sheep. Often he called to mind how God would one day give them the land of Canaan as an everlasting inheritance. He had faith in this promise and wondered how God would bring it to pass.

At last the hour strikes. Israel is to be free and return to the land of their fathers. Moses is with his flock near Horeb, when behold, a flame comes out of the midst of a bush, but the bush is not consumed. He stands aside to see the wonder. Then: "God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses." He answered to his name and the voice continues: "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

Then he was told that God had seen the affliction of his people in Egypt, and had heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters. Now he had come to deliver them from bondage and lead them to the good land which he had promised to Abraham and his seed. He concluded by saying: "Come now, therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

God needed Moses to help him. He always needs a man to lead out when he has an important work to do. And this man was ready, but he did not know it. In fact he protested, made excuses and tried in every way to shift the responsibility. First he said: "Who am I, that I should go

unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" He felt unequal to the task. And why did God choose Moses? Because he was really ready. God never calls a man who has not pondered deeply the problems connected with the work to be done. He sees the need of it, but hesitates to accept the responsibility. Moses was modest, and even after the Lord assured him of his assistance, he demurred. It is interesting to note how the Lord answers his objections, but fails to convince him. Moses makes a final excuse. "O my Lord, I am not eloquent .... but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." To this the Lord answers:

"Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say."

What a promise! How could he resist such an appeal? A man can be too self-conscious and backward. Moses should have known that if the Lord was with him, it did not matter much who was against him or what his handicaps were. Because of his unwillingness to accept the commission, he lost part of the blessing attached to its accomplishment. The Lord called his brother Aaron to share it with him. Because he did not have faith in God's promise to loosen his tongue, Aaron was selected to be his spokesman. So God always finds another to do our work, if we are too timid to assume the responsibility. It is well to remember that with God's help, there is nothing we cannot do.

---

*Our Twilight Hour*

Happy the heart that keeps its twilight hour
And in the depth of heavenly peace reclined,
Love to commune with thoughts of tender power—
Thoughts that ascend, like angels beautiful,
A shining Jacob's ladder of the mind.

—P. H. Hayne.

*Class Problems*

1. How was the act of Moses, quoted from Hebrews, an act of faith?
2. How can a desert training develop leadership?
3. Moses had been trained in leadership. Why was he not prepared to deliver Israel when he fled from Egypt?
4. What qualifications should the "Do it now" motto have?
5. Give examples of men who have delayed their work for meditation.
6. Do you think that the Lord took Moses completely by surprise when he called him, or had he been thinking about it before? Give reasons for your answer.
7. What excuses did Moses make?
8. How do you account for his unwillingness to accept the call?
9. What did he lose by his attitude?

## Lesson 17

# PHARAOH, THE HARD HEARTED

Lesson Text: Exodus 4:29-31; 5; 6:1-8.

Song; Student Reading: Exodus 4:29-31; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Exodus 5:1-3.

Concert Prayer: Eternal Father, maker of heaven and earth and all that they contain, in reverence and humility we worship thee, and acknowledge thee as the giver of every gift and blessing that we enjoy. Help us always to realize that in and of ourselves we are weak and helpless. Thou art our strength and our salvation. Give us the joy that comes from working with thee in the accomplishment of thy purposes in the earth. Amen.

*Memory Text: He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.—Luke* 1:52.

Explain: 5:1 Pharaoh. The Lord God of Israel. 4 Let the people. 6 The taskmasters. 7 Straw to make brick. 8 The tale. 12 Stubble instead of straw. 21 Our saviour to be abhorred. 6:1 A strong hand. 3 The name of God Almighty. 6 Redeem.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Fighting Against God*

The great Deliverance had a humble beginning. There were no extended preparations, no gathering of an army, no display of force. Moses, having first obtained permission from Jethro to return to Egypt, simply placed his wife and two small sons on a donkey, and leaning on his staff trudged by her side. If Pharaoh had been told that this humble shepherd was on his way to wrest from him his nation of slaves, he would have laughed. Such an idea was preposterous. What could one man do against the might and power of the greatest empire in the world? What, indeed, had not God walked by the side of the shepherd!

Near Sinai, Moses met Aaron who had been sent to assist him. The brothers had not seen each other since Moses left Egypt, forty years before, and it was a joyful meeting, especially since they were to be associated together in so great an enterprise. Moses related all that the Lord had said about his intentions concerning Israel, and together

they decided upon a course of procedure. First, as the Lord had already suggested, they would call together the leaders of their people, and secure their full consent and cooperation for the great undertaking. It would be a waste of time for them to plead with the stubborn Pharaoh, and overcome his resistance, unless their leadership was acknowledged and supported by their own leaders.

Moses and Aaron were heartily welcomed by the elders of Israel. And there was great rejoicing when they revealed their mission. We read: "And the people believed: and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped."

Their next duty was to deliver God's message to the king. This required no little courage, for not only was it certain that he would refuse their request, but their lives were in danger; for this particular Pharaoh was a cruel tyrant, impulsive, arrogant and all powerful. Without his consent no man dared lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. He held absolute power of life and death over his subjects. But Moses and Aaron did not hesitate on that account. Boldly they made their way into his audience-room where he received deputations. Without cringing or bowing, they stood in his presence and declared: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness."

This was not a request, it was a demand. We can imagine the haughty monarch turning pale with anger. How dared these insolent intruders ask for *his* slaves to be released from their work? With what scorn and contempt he must have flung his answer back to Moses: "Who is the Lord, that *I* should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." They repeated their demand in more precise terms. Pharaoh was beside himself with rage and cried: "Wherefore do ye, Moses and

Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens."

And to show his utter contempt for the God of Israel, he ordered that henceforth no straw should be given the slaves for their brick. "Let them go and gather straw for themselves," was his royal command to the taskmasters, and at the same time he insisted that the number of brick required of them be not diminished. Of course, this brought an immediate protest from the slaves. Pharaoh was asking the impossible. Brick could not be made without straw. To this reasonable statement, the king scornfully replied: "Ye are idle, ye are idle: therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord. Go therefore now, and work; for there shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks."

Then they complained to Moses, that instead of the liberty he had promised, their burdens were increased. They accused him of making them abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and had really put a sword in the king's hand to slay them. Their complaint seemed to have some justification, and Moses laid the case before the Lord. He was instructed to say to the children of Israel: "I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments."

And now began a struggle, long, bitter and intense, between Moses and Aaron, representing Jehovah, and the stubborn king. Pharaoh set himself to defy the God of Israel, and his heart grew harder and harder. He had said that he would not permit Israel to go, and he was determined to keep his royal word at all hazards. He dared to match his power against the decreed purpose of Jehovah. Plague after plague was sent to afflict his people and himself, as signs of God's power, but still he refused to yield. At times when the plague became unbearable, he would promise to

let Israel go, but as soon as the affliction was removed, he became his old stubborn self again.

Pharaoh could not see that the pain and distress which he was bringing upon himself and his people was the result of his own self-will and pride. The repeated warnings of Moses had no effect on his hard heart. The fact that each plague was more severe than the last failed to move him. He refused to humble himself, or to recognize any power to which he owed allegiance, other than his own stubborn will. The children of Israel were *his* people. These wretched creatures, broken in body and spirit, who dared not even call their lives their own, were *his;* his to command, his to punish, his to kill, if he so willed. He was supreme, all power in Egypt was his, all glory belonged to him. Let one of these slaves so much as open his mouth in complaint, and the taskmaster's lash is on his back, and he hears ringing in his ears, "Ye are idle—ye are idle."

Poor blind Pharaoh, he did not realize what he was doing, that in the flickering lives of these wretched slaves were hid the germs that flowered into the world's salvation, that a God was to come through their lineage. He could not see that in setting his will against the will of Israel's God, he was sealing his own doom. And what was true of Pharaoh is true of every man. Woe to the man or set of men who dare to raise their puny arm against the purposes of the Almighty.

A final warning was given to Pharaoh: "Unless you let Israel go to serve me I will slay thy son, even thy first born." And this decree was to fall upon every Egyptian family. The king still refused and the plague came. Like the crash of doom it descended upon every home, and a wailing cry rent the heavens, for there was "not a house where there was not one dead." A stubborn self-willed tyrant king had nearly ruined a nation. "Rise up, and get you forth from among my people," he cried, "both ye and the children of Israel; and go serve the Lord, as ye have said."

But it was too late to bring back the dead. And even now after they had gone, Pharaoh pursued after them to bring them back. He simply would not acknowledge himself defeated, but was determined to "harden his heart" to the last. The Red Sea, where he found his grave, is an everlasting memorial to the folly of fighting against God.

---

*King Robert's Pride*

And slowly lifting up his kingly head
He to a learned clerk beside him said,
"What mean those words?" The clerk made answer meet,
"He has put down the mighty from their seat,
And has exalted them of low degree."
Thereat King Robert muttered scornfully,
" 'Tis well that such seditious words are sung
Only by priests and in the Latin tongue;
For unto priests and people be it known,
There is no power can push me from my throne!"

—Longfellow.

*Class Problems*

1. Why did Moses and Aaron first consult the elders of Israel?
2. What was the character of Pharaoh?
3. What request did Moses and Aaron make of him? What was his answer?
4. Explain the statement, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart."
5. How do you account for the fact that he was so stubborn?
6. What should have convinced Pharaoh that he was fighting God?
7. Give examples of other men who have fought against God. What has been their fate?
8. In the light of this lesson which of the Beatitudes should we especially cultivate?
9. Have we any Pharaohs in our own communities? Explain.
10. Tell about King Robert of Sicily.

## Lesson 18

# JETHRO, THE PRIEST OF MIDIAN

Lesson Text: Exodus 18.

Song; Student Reading: Ex. 18:9-11; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Ex. 18:21.

Concert Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to realize that no one man can accomplish thy work alone, but that there is need of organization and unity of effort. Give us the spirit of cooperation, and of working together in a common cause. Whether our part shall be great or small, may we be loyal to one another and to thee in every position to which we may be called. And if ever our own ambitions or selfish interests stand in the way of the coming of thy kingdom, may we be willing to say, "Thy will be done," for Jesus' sake. Amen.

*Memory Text: And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.—Ephesians* 4:11-12.

Explain: 1 Jethro. Midian. 2 Sent her back. 5 The mount of God. 11 Than all gods. 18 Surely wear away. 19 And God shall be with thee. 21 Hating covetousness. 23 God command thee so. To their place.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Sharing Responsibility*

When Israel reached the borders of Sinai an event occurred which had far-reaching consequences in the development of God's chosen people. It came about through the visit to the camp of Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, who also brought with him the wife and two sons of the great leader. Moses had sent them back before he entered Egypt so that he might be more free from any other responsibility than the great task he had undertaken.

It was a happy reunion. Aaron and the elders of Israel came and they all feasted and rejoiced together. Jethro had heard of the great things which the Lord had done in Egypt for Israel's sake, and how he had delivered them from bondage. So he blessed the Lord and offered burnt offerings and sacrifices to the God of Israel.

The next day when Jethro saw how Moses sat to judge

the people, and they stood in line from morning until night to bring their cases before him, he said to Moses, "What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?" Moses explained that he was judging between them, and making known to them the statutes of God, and his laws. Then Jethro said: "The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone."

Then he advised Moses to select able men, such as feared God, men of truth who could not be bribed, and make them judges also. All great matters were still to be heard by Moses, while minor cases could be decided by the new judges appointed. "So shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee. If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace."

There are some very great persons named in the scripture of whom little is said. They come into view for a moment, and then retire before we have a chance to get acquainted with them. Jethro was such a man. It is unfortunate that we know so little about him, for it is evident that he was a man, not only of great ability and executive capacity, but also deeply religious, and in close communion with God. In addition to this, he was both a prince and a priest among his own people—the Midianites, who, it will be remembered, were also descendants of Abraham. This would make it likely that he had a knowledge of the true God. Some writers claim that he was educated in Chaldea, Abraham's first home. During the long years which Moses spent in Midian he must have been greatly influenced by his intimate association with this great man.

The advice which he gave to Moses on this occasion was of the soundest kind. It teaches several important les-

sons. 1. Others can see and form a correct estimate of our work better than we can ourselves. We are too near and too interested in it to form unprejudiced judgments concerning it. Let us listen to the counsel of those who have had more experience than we have. Moses saw that the advice of Jethro was good and acted on it immediately. It is interesting to note in this connection that God did not reveal to Moses the mistake he was making. Some things we must learn for ourselves. 2. Solitary rulership causes undue strain on the individual who attempts it. Even good men are sometimes very foolish. God expects no man to kill himself even in his service. Jethro warned Moses of this danger. 3. When a man attempts to do everything, it interferes with his higher duties. Often great and good men are employed in meaner tasks than they ought to be. It takes time that should be devoted to higher duties. Men should do the biggest things that they are able to do. There are plenty to do the smaller tasks. 4. It leaves much talent undeveloped. There were many men in the ranks of Israel who were able to do much of the work that Moses was doing. On investigation it would be found that society has many undiscovered judges. 5. Partnership in government creates contentment and good will. If positions are monopolized by a few, it creates dissatisfaction and often violent opposition. Give men responsibility and they become loyal and devoted to the government, or the cause in which they labor.

That government, that church, that organization is best which distributes most opportunities for service among its members. Many great rulers have lost out because they tried to be the "whole show." They may succeed for a time, because of superior ability and unlimited power, but in the end they are bound to fail. No great men can develop under a regime where they have nothing to do. There must be democracy in government if it is to endure. Wise old Jethro started something when he gave such excellent counsel to Moses. It was the beginning of the glory of Israel.

*Teamwork*

The world is full of problems, there's much to cause distress;
We all are bowed beneath the cares, that daily round us press;
There's only one solution, 'tis simply stated thus:
"A little less of you and me, a little more of us."
The rule of each one for himself most foolish is to follow;
It brings no savor to the game, its victories are hollow.
But the other plan has never failed to bring satisfaction plus:
"A little less of you and me, a little more of us."

—W. D. Card.

*Class Problems*

1. Tell all you can about Jethro. Why did he visit Moses?
2. What advice did he give Moses? Why?
3. What advantages are there in solitary rulership?
4. Name five disadvantages and discuss each.
5. How can the members of the class profit by Jethro's counsel?
6. Discuss the government of Italy under its present ruler.
7. Does his apparent success disprove the statements in the lesson? Why?

## Lesson 19

# MOSES, THE LAWGIVER

Lesson Text: Exodus 19; 24:1-8.

Song; Student Reading: Ex. 19:7-8; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Ex. 19:17-18.

Concert Prayer: Holy Father, we thank thee for the great commandments which came from Sinai, and for the lesson of thy holiness which they reveal. We are grateful for the life and example of thy servant Moses, and for the revelation of thy personality which he gave to the world. Wilt thou give to us also some great mission to perform, some special service to render, some worthy cause to champion. And for all the success we may attain, we will give thee the honor and the praise, through Jesus Christ, thy Son. Amen.

*Memory Text: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.—Deut.* 6:5.

Explain: 19:1 The same day. Wilderness of Sinai. 4 I bare you on eagles' wings. Brought you unto myself. 5 If ye will obey. A peculiar treasure. Above all people. 6 A kingdom of priests. 7 The elders. 9 In a thick cloud. And believe thee. 10 Sanctify them. 12 Set bounds unto the people. 13 They shall come up. 22 The priests. 24:1 And he said. Nadab and Abihu. Seventy of the elders. 3 And Moses came and told the people. 4 And Moses wrote. 8 Concerning all these words.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Voice from Sinai*

Two months have passed since that eventful night when the children of Israel fled from Egypt, and now they have arrived at Mount Sinai. It was here that God had called Moses from the burning bush. It was at this Mount that Moses received his commission to deliver Israel, and it was here also that Aaron came to meet him when he was on his way to Egypt. And now he had returned with the hosts of Israel to worship in this sacred place. At the foot of the Mount to the north is a large plain, which commands a full view of the towering cliff rising like a great altar to the sky. On this plain the whole congregation of Israel were encamped. It was a fitting place for the enactment of the greatest single event in the history of God's chosen people

—the giving of the Law to Israel. Get the picture if you can. The flashing lightning, playing around the cloud-capped mountain, and the roaring thunder, deep and terrible, shaking the very earth itself; then a voice from the Mount, which could be heard far and wide over the plain, announcing the Great Law which was henceforth to be the foundation of a new religion in the world. It was the voice of God himself proclaiming a higher ideal of conduct than men had known before.

Up to this time Israel had thought of God as great and powerful, as a mighty deliverer, who could match his strength with the gods of Egypt and overcome them. He was worshipped as a God to be feared, because of his power to punish. Now he is revealed as a God of righteousness, who makes certain prohibitions in the conduct of his children. Following are the commandments as it is thought they were originally given:

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
2. Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image.
3. Thou shalt not take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.
5. Honor thy father and thy mother.
6. Thou shalt do no murder.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal.
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness.
10. Thou shalt not covet.

It will be noticed that the first four state our duty to God and the last six, the duty we owe to men. They are beautifully summed up in the two great commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," and "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

It was not only fitting, but necessary that these commandments should be given under conditions of the greatest solemnity. Israel had for generations lived in an environ-

ment and under conditions where no reverence for a moral law could develop. Simply to have announced these laws in a matter-of-fact way would have created little interest and no respect. These people, with generations of slavery as a background, had no sentiment of reverence for law. All they knew was the sting of the master's lash. With us it is different. The mere statement of a law wins instant respect. But not so with them; they must see a mountain of red granite that seemed on fire, with lightnings flashing about it like leaping flames, and thunder rolling from its summit, and the voice of Jehovah speaking from the darkness, before they were ready to enter into a covenant of obedience. They learned amidst the fire and smoke of Sinai, that if God was to bless them, they in turn must keep his commandments; they must obey his law. There was still much for them to learn, but they learned that day that God was holy and demanded holiness in his children.

And Moses was in the Mount with God. He was permitted to enter into the divine presence and receive from the great Jehovah himself those tablets of the law, which was to inspire and shape the moral and religious life of the world. It is impossible for us to estimate or fully appreciate the far-reaching effect of this man's work. Among all the lawgivers of history, there is none that come within hailing distance of Moses. As a lawgiver he stands supreme among all the sons of men.

Efforts are being made by many modern critics to destroy the supernatural, from which came the laws of Israel. They would blot out Sinai as a myth. No thunders shook the earth, no lightnings flashed, no voice was heard, no tablets of stone containing the law were delivered to Israel. But if they take all that away, how are we to account for the creation of that profound respect for their law, which is one of the outstanding characteristics of the Hebrew race? Never has there been a people so devoted to an ideal, so tenacious in their adherence to their religion

as the descendants of these slaves who heard the voice of God at Sinai. One of the charges brought against Jesus was that he had perverted and disregarded the Law of Moses. And Stephen was stoned to death because he dared to hint that the Law of Moses might be superceded by the more perfect and higher law which Christ taught. Even to this day, though the Jews are scattered among all the nations of the earth, they conscientiously teach and strictly follow the Law of Moses. Such loyalty and such devotion to a law could never have come had it not been given in some supernatural way.

No religion can grip the hearts of men, nor make for righteousness in the earth which does not have a divine origin. There must be some Sinai from which the law of God can come, some great man to stand on the mount with God and receive his word. This great honor was given to Moses, and we at this distant day are the beneficiaries of that revelation. We repeat in our homes and churches the commandments that the congregation of Israel heard at the foot of Sinai on that glorious day so long ago. They are our heritage from the past; they are the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob, that through them and their seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed.

---

*The Face of God*

"I do beseech thee, God, show me thy face."
"Come up to me in Sinai on the morn!
Thou shalt behold as much as may be borne."
And on a rock stood Moses, lone in space.
From Sinai's top, the vaporous, thunderous place,
God passed in a cloud, an earthly garment worn
To hide, and thus reveal. In love, not scorn,
He put him in a cliff of the rock's base,
Covered him with His hand, his eyes to screen—
Passed—lifted it; His back alone appears!
Ah, Moses, had He turned, and hadst thou seen

The pale face crowned with thorns, baptized with tears,
The eyes of the true Man, by men belied,
Thou hadst beheld God's face and straightway died.
—George McDonald.

*Class Problems*

1. Where is Sinai? What great events have happened there?
2. Why was it important that the announcement of the Law should have such an awe-inspiring setting?
3. What preparations were made for the great events? (Exodus 19:10-14.)
4. What evidence have we that the Law of Moses is divine?
5. Repeat the commandments as they are supposed to have been given to Moses.
6. How may they be summed up? (Deut. 6:5; Leviticus 19:18.)
7. In what way have all nations of the earth been blessed through the laws of Moses?
8. How do you account for the lasting impression made on the Jews by these laws?

## Lesson 20

# AARON, THE SPOKESMAN

Lesson Text: Exodus 4:14-16; 32.

Song; Student Reading: Ex. 4:14-16; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Ex. 32:31-32.

Concert Prayer: Eternal and gracious Father, may we enjoy in rich measure the presence of thy Spirit during this hour of worship. We pray for courage and strength to stand fast to our convictions of the truth. Knowing thy will, help us to do it in the face of opposition, persecution and even death. Amidst the clamor of the multitude and the demands of the ungodly, help us to remain firm and steadfast and immovable in our loyalty and devotion to thee, we humbly pray. Amen.

*Memory Text: But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.—Acts* 4:19.

Explain: 32:1 Make us gods. 2 Earrings. 4 After he had made it. 5 A feast to the Lord. 7 Thy people. 9 Stiffnecked. 19 And brake them. 20 Burnt it. 22 Mischief. 24 There came out this calf. 25 Were naked. 26 Who is on the Lord's side? 29 Consecrate yourselves. 30 Make an atonement. 32 If thou wilt forgive their sin. If not, blot me....out of thy book. 34 I will visit their sin upon them.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Shifting Responsibility*

The Lord himself gives us our first information concerning Aaron. It will be remembered that Moses tried to excuse himself from the responsibility of leading Israel out of Egypt by pleading his slowness of speech, and the Lord said: "Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well * * * and he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God."

So Aaron was called to be a spokesman for Moses to Israel and to Pharaoh. Thus he became an important factor in the deliverance of God's people from bondage. Moses formulated the plan of action, and supplied the ideas, and Aaron made them known in eloquent and convincing language to the people. It was Aaron also who spoke the word

of God to Pharaoh. We see by this what an important part he played in this great drama. It often happens that a man of ordinary ability supplements and reinforces the work of a great leader. Moses needed Aaron, but it is doubtful if Aaron would ever have been heard of had it not been for his younger brother.

There have been few men like Moses in the world—epoch-making and history-making leaders—who have left their names shining through the ages as lights to guide and inspire those who came after them. Aaron was justified in leaning on his younger and stronger brother, but it had a tendency to make him a mere cipher. He grew so accustomed to speak for Moses, that he gradually lost the power to think or speak for himself. Aaron had an attractive personality, was a great orator, pleasing in his manner and dress, and endowed with gifts that win popularity. He might have become a great leader had it not been for his vacillation. He lacked tenacity of purpose, and could not be depended on to carry anything through. The test of strength is a tenacious, unyielding will. This Aaron lacked.

This weakness in Aaron appeared especially at the time he had been left in charge of Israel while Moses was in the mountains receiving instruction concerning the construction of the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant. The leader had been gone forty days, and the people were getting restless. Finally they organized themselves into a great mob and demanded of Aaron: "Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him."

This was a time of all times when he should have stood firm. With his gift of eloquence he could have pleaded with them to remember the great things the Lord had done for them. Only a few weeks back they had heard the thunders over Sinai, and the voice of God proclaiming the great commandments. He could have reminded them of the covenant

Claude Lorrain

AARON AND THE ISRAELITES WORSHIP THE GOLDEN CALF

they had so recently made to serve God and him only. But Aaron did not do that. He let the people intimidate him. They wanted an image to worship, and he made a golden calf or bullock for them. Worse still, he built an altar and proclaimed a feast in honor of the new god.

The Lord warned Moses of what was happening in the camp, and threatened to destroy Israel for their great sin. Moses pleaded with him that he would turn away his anger and spare his chosen people. But when he neared the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger overcame him, and he broke the tablets of stone which contained the Ten Commandments. Then he burned the calf in the fire, "and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it."

"And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?" Aaron excuses himself, first, on the ground that the people were set on mischief and virtually compelled him to make an image, and second, that he cast the gold they gave him into the fire, "and there came out this calf." What a weak, foolish way this was of sluffing the responsibility of the sin from his own shoulders! How different from Moses, who instead of blaming the people cried: "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold; Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."

And yet let us not condemn Aaron too severely, for most of us do as he did. We too yield to the pressure of society, and fail to live up to our highest convictions. We defer to public opinion, which is often so strong that we dare not hold out against it. We are afraid that our neighbors will criticize us if we stand for the right. Many public officials yield to the clamor of the crowd. Preachers surrender their convictions to please their congregations. Oh, yes, most of us are like Aaron.

"I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf." What an excuse! He blames nature. He says nothing about the mold he used, or the engraving tools he made. The calf was just an accident. He was not to blame. It came out of the fire. How foolish it sounds! And yet we do the same thing. How many of us excuse our sins by blaming something or somebody! We are like the man under the influence of liquor who abused a telegraph pole against which he had bruised his face. He was not at fault; it was the pole that did it. We are not to blame for our sins. They are inherited weaknesses, or unintentional, or something else. Always the poor calf was forced upon us without any fault of ours. We are simply the victims of circumstances over which we had no control. How much better it would be to accept the responsibility for our acts, confess our sins, and pray for strength to overcome them.

Moses and Aaron! What a contrast! Moses, steadfast as a rock, immovable as the mountain on which he talked with God, calling for those who were on the Lord's side to come to him, but willing if need be to stand for God alone. Aaron, well meaning, popular, eloquent and capable of doing much good, but undependable in a crisis, and ready to make excuses for his failure. And yet, so like the most of us that we can forgive him, as God did.

---

*Dare to Do Right*

Dare to do right! Dare to be true!
You have a work that no other can do;
Do it so bravely, so kindly, so well,
Angels will hasten the story to tell.
Dare to do right! Dare to be true!
Other men's failures can never save you;
Stand by your conscience, your honor, your faith;
Stand like a hero, and battle till death.

—George L. Taylor.

*Class Problems*

1. Give a character sketch of Aaron.
2. Was his environment good or bad for his development? Why?
3. Why have people through all ages been inclined to worship idols?
4. Israel had just experienced the great spiritual manifestations at Sinai. How do you account for their apostasy so soon?
5. What excuses did Aaron make for his sin?
6. How do we make the same excuses?
7. Contrast the characters of Moses and Aaron.
8. What else do you know about Aaron than what is contained in this lesson?

LESSON 21

# CALEB, THE FAITHFUL SPY

Text: Numbers 13:17-33; 14:1-35.

Song; Student Reading: Num. 11:27-29; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Num. 14:19.

Concert Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, inspire our hearts to receive the message of our lesson today. We like ancient Israel have had our "Sinai," and received thy commandments and thy will concerning our inheritance in the land of promise. We too are standing on the borders of Canaan, with its high walls, its towers, its giants and its dangers to conquer. Give us faith and courage to enter and take possession. May we realize that we need fear no evil, for thou art with us as we fight our way to success and final victory. Amen.

*Memory Text: Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.—Numbers* 13:30.

Explain: 13:17 Southward. 20 Time of the first-ripe grapes. 21 The wilderness of Zin. Rehob and Hamath. 23 The brook of Eshcol. 26 To Kadesh. 32 Eateth up the inhabitants. 33 The giants. 14:9 Bread for us. 17 Let the power of my Lord be great. 33 Shall wander. 34 My breach of promise.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Arrested Deliverance*

The object of the long stay at Sinai of a year has been accomplished. The great Commandments have been given to Israel, and the Tabernacle and Ark of the Covenant completed, and Israel organized into a great army under the leadership of Joshua. Now they break camp and take up their march northward toward the Promised Land. The priests carry the Ark, the symbol of God's presence, and fall in behind the pillar of cloud which moves in an upright shaft before them. Many interesting events happen on the way which we have not space to mention in this lesson. They reach the border of Canaan and halt at Kadesh. God fully intended this to be the end of their journey in the wilderness. There was nothing more for them to do except to enter and take possession, since the land was theirs by right of inheritance and gift from God. But while the Lord had promised to give them the land, it would be necessary

for them to obtain it by conquest, for the Canaanites held possession of it.

At this critical time, however, when everything depended upon a surprise attack, they hesitated, and proposed to Moses (Deut. 1:20-25) that spies be sent to investigate conditions and make a report. While Moses agreed to the proposal, it was a fatal mistake. Clearly it was not their duty to send men to search out the land, but trust in God's promise and go and take possession. Could they have foreseen the disastrous consequences of their action, they would have hesitated to show such lack of faith, and distrust of God's word.

Twelve men were selected for the expedition, one from each tribe. They were instructed to examine and report as to the conditions of (1) the land, whether it was fertile or barren, (2) the towns, whether they were walled or unprotected, (3) the people, whether they were strong or weak, whether they were many or few. For fear that the inhabitants might have some knowledge of their intentions, they were advised to go up in the mountains where they would be less likely to be observed. Had the Canaanites discovered them and their purpose, it would have fared ill with them.

The spies seem to have made a good job of it, traversing the entire land from south to north about 180 miles. We do not know anything about their experiences, but they all returned with a glowing report of the richness of the country, in proof of which they brought back an immense cluster of grapes, borne between two on a staff. They also agreed that the land contained great cities, protected by large walls, and towers reaching up to the sky. The men were all large in stature, some of them so tall that the spies looked like pigmies beside them. They also saw great giants, the sons of Anak, in the land, "and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight," they said. With such fortifications and such men to oppose

them, ten of the spies affirmed that the land would be difficult to conquer.

Only two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, advised an immediate attack. They had made a more careful survey of the real strength of the Canaanites, and saw what the others did not see, that they were really in a weakened condition as a result of a long series of invasions by the Egyptians. But better than that, they saw them through God's power, and they looked very insignificant and easily conquered, while the ten saw God through the power of the Canaanites, and he looked very small. It was simply a question of faith. Caleb and Joshua were confident that Israel could capture Palestine for three reasons: (1) God had promised the land to them again and again; (2) He had already demonstrated his power in delivering them from Egyptian bondage; (3) While their enemies appeared strong they were in reality very weak.

Caleb did not hesitate to take a decided stand on the matter: "Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it." Brave words these, and the advice was sound, for their army was well organized. They had already had military experience by winning a battle over the Amalekites. They were really ready for the conquest. But the report of the ten spies frightened them, and they gave way to a wild panic of confusion and disorder. It looked as if the whole enterprise would be a failure. "Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt," they cried.

At this critical juncture the two brave spies, Caleb and Joshua, stood forward against the madness of the people. They protested against their rebellious cowardice. "If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us. * * * *Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not."

This passionate protest was met with stones, and there

is no telling what might have happened had not the cloud appeared over the Tabernacle, as a signal that God would speak with the people; and their hot blood of a moment before must have run cold as they heard their doom pronounced: "How long will this people despise me, and how long will they not believe in me?" And now because of their lack of faith, their rebellion and their cowardice, they are never to enter the promised land at all. Their opportunity is gone and they are condemned to wander in the wilderness until they die. Only Caleb and Joshua among that great host shall see and enjoy an inheritance in Canaan. And interesting to note, the city of high walls and dreaded giants shall be Caleb's future home.

A great cry arose, a cry of sorrow and despair. But it came too late. Israel had refused their great opportunity. They had turned down God's offer of a home in the "land flowing with milk and honey." They had been an army on the march, ready to enter and take possession of the home of their fathers, now they were to be simply wanderers, without a home, or the hope of one.

The lesson of their tragedy should sink deep into our hearts. We too are promised our Canaan. But there are walled cities that we must scale, evil habits that have fortified themselves in our lives and hearts that we must overcome. There are giants that we must conquer, strong passions that burn in us, temper, pride, indolence. But we must not hesitate. "Their defense," said faithful Caleb, "is departed from them." Evil is really weak. It blusters and makes great threats, and pretends to be bigger than it is. Let us go right straight up to our goal, trusting in God, and Canaan is ours. But if we doubt, or hesitate, then, like Israel, we are doomed to the wilderness as long as we live, and the promised land remains but a dream that might have come true, but never will.

And what of Caleb? Was God's promise to him fulfilled? Did Hebron become his inheritance? Yes; forty-

five years he waited. He kept his soul in patience. He did his duties in the wilderness while his heart was in Canaan. He saw the people of his own generation dropping out one by one until all were gone. He heard the last farewell of Moses, and saw him ascend the slopes of Nebo to his lonely grave. And still the faithful Caleb remained.

Then came the conquest, and Caleb went to his old comrade Joshua and repeated the words of Moses forty years before, that Hebron should be his, and he asked permission to go and take it. We see the grim old soldier as he stands before Joshua, and our hearts beat quicker as we hear him say: "I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in." Wonderful words from a man of eighty-five! And it was not a mere boast. For he took the stronghold of Hebron, giants, walls, and all, and it became his inheritance, as the Lord had said.

---

*Press On*

Trust in thy own untried capacity;
No man shall place a limit on thy strength.
Such triumphs as no mortals ever gained
May yet be thine, if thou wilt but believe
In thy Creator and thyself. At length,
Some feet will tread all heights now unattained;
Why not thy own? Press on, achieve, achieve!

*Class Problems*

1. How long did Israel remain at Sinai, and what had been accomplished there?
2. Do you think that it was a mistake to send spies to Canaan? Why?
3. What were their instructions?
4. What report did the ten make? The two?
5. What effect did the majority report have?

6. What was their punishment? Does it seem to you to be justified?
7. What part did Moses take in this affair?
8. Tell the story of Caleb's reward. (Joshua 14:6-14.)

## Lesson 22

# BALAAM, THE COVETOUS

Lesson Text: Numbers 22.

Song; Student Reading: Num. 22:12-13; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Num. 22:17-18.

Concert Prayer: We come to thee, our Heavenly Father, that we may more deeply enter into thy joy. May we ever have ringing in our ears that tragic cry of Balaam, "I have sinned," and remember what that sin was. Help us to realize that it is impossible for us to serve God and Balak at the same time. We cannot both bless and curse Israel. Give us the courage this day to choose whom we will serve, and having chosen, may we never turn back or falter in our loyalty and devotion to thee, we humbly pray. Amen.

*Memory Text: If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more.—Numbers* 22:18.

Explain: 1 Plains of Moab. On this side Jordan. 4 Elders of Midian. 5 To Pethor. 7 Rewards of divination. 12 They are blessed. 22 God's anger was kindled because he went. 31 Opened the eyes of Balaam. 40 Offered oxen. 41 Baal.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Serving God and Balak*

Thirty-eight years in the wilderness followed the refusal of the children of Israel to invade Canaan from the south, when the spies made their report. Just where they spent this long stretch of time is uncertain. Some passages seem to indicate that they remained in and around Kadesh, others that they wandered around the borders of Edom. We do not know; they may have been at different times in most parts of the Arabian peninsula. But wherever they were, they must have pursued their ordinary mode of life, scattering out at times to find pastures for their flocks and herds. Several skirmishes with other tribes are recorded, and several uprisings against the authority within their own ranks. It was a sad, hard life, literally a struggle for existence.

But notwithstanding the hardships they endured, it must have been on the whole a period of education and

growth. The religious ideals, set forth by Moses, must have been assimilated in part at least. It is certain that the group which emerged from the wilderness was very different from the one that entered it forty years before. They were better organized, better disciplined, more loyal and faithful, more dependable, and better prepared to take possession of their inheritance.

When the call finally came to move, both Aaron and Miriam, his sister, were dead, as were all the men over twenty years of age when they left Egypt, except Moses, Caleb and Joshua. Permission was asked of the king of Edom to pass through his territory but this was denied, so they had to turn southward to the gulf of Akabah and around the mountain range to the east. This took much longer, but the king of Edom raised a large army to resist any attempt to cross his territory.

When they reached the border of Moab, Balak, the king of that country, was frightened. He had heard of their success over other desert tribes in war, and he dared not meet them in battle. He had heard also of the influence which their prophet Moses had with God, and he decided to match that influence by securing a prophet of his own. Far to the east, living somewhere near the headwaters of the Euphrates river, was a prophet by the name of Balaam, and Balak sent for him to come and curse Israel. He did not expect him to come for nothing, and was willing to pay him well for his services.

Balaam is one of those interesting characters that we deal with in the Bible, who appear on the scene without warning and then disappear again, and we learn no more about them. He was a prophet of the Lord, and as we read about him, we feel certain that it is a true account, and that Balaam was a real person, not so very far removed from our own experiences.

The messengers from Balak reached the prophet in due time, with their reward, if he would come and curse Israel

so that Balak could prevail against them. Balaam would not commit himself, but he asked them to lodge with him during the night and he would give them an answer in the morning. Then he went to the Lord about it, which was the proper thing to do. The answer came to him definitely and without any qualifications: "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed."

So in the morning he said to the princes of Balak: "Get you into your land: for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you." Up to this time Balaam had acted as a true prophet should, and there is nothing to criticize in his conduct. The episode would have ended here, had not Balak's case seemed desperate. He would not take no for an answer. He evidently thought that every man had his price, and in this case that he had failed to make a large enough offer for the services of the prophet.

So he sent a new offer to Balaam by princes more honorable than the first, saying: "Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: For I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people." Apparently this does not appeal to Balaam, for he said: "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more."

But he does not stop there; if he had all would have been well. He really wants to go, and begins to trifle with his conscience, which is the most dangerous thing a person can do. He asks the messengers to stay over night, so that he might know if the Lord would give him any further instructions. He had received his answer and knew what the will of God was, but he thought of the great honors promised him by Balak. Surely there must be some way that he could get what he wanted, and please God at the same time.

How many there are who make that mistake. They

want to serve God, if it does not interfere with what they want themselves. If God is coming their way they want to go with him. How loath we are to give up the things we want! How hard it is for us to say, "Thy will be done, not mine." We talk about dedicating to God all that we have and are, but few of us are willing to do it. It is so easy to find excuses for doing what we want done. We talk big: "If Balak would give me a house full of silver and gold I would not do it," and in the next breath, "but stay over tonight and we will see what can be done about it." Keeping the temptation over night is dangerous. The messengers should have been sent away at once.

Well, Balaam got permission to go, but he was to say nothing except what the Lord should tell him to say. He is delighted with the result of his second inquiry. Apparently he does not realize that he is getting into a difficult situation. How can he satisfy both God and Balak? No doubt he said to himself, like so many do when they undertake to compromise with sin: "There will be some way out of it. Surely I can take advantage of this opportunity for personal gain, and then I can serve God more faithfully afterward." Having trifled with his conscience, he does not hesitate to risk the safety of a whole nation to get what he wants.

On the way he receives an awful warning. An angel of God appears to him and warns him of the danger ahead. He sees his mistake and cries, "I have sinned," but still he does not tear the desire from his heart. "I will go back," he says, "if you want me to." We lose patience with him. If he knows that he is sinning, why does he not turn back of his own accord? That would have pleased the Lord and he would have been forgiven. But he went on to his doom. Some excuse him because he was granted permission to go. Of course he was; we all are. There is no compulsion. We do not have to do what the Lord wants us to do unless we are willing to do it.

In the end he lost out on both sides. He neither pleased God nor Balak. He was compelled to bless Israel as the Lord had said, and was sent home by the king of Moab in disgrace. He did not receive the honors and riches he had expected, and he lost the favor and blessing of God besides.

How true it is that we cannot serve two masters! We must make a choice. Balak may give us riches and honor, but only God can give us peace and contentment. "Riches and honors" are cheap. They glitter and attract us for a moment, and then they are gone. And yet, many sell their souls to possess them. What folly! Better to seek the things that abide, the riches that are eternal; then shall our days be filled with a joy that never fades, and a light that never grows dim.

---

*A Life Worth While*

May every soul that touches mine,
Be it but the slightest contact,
Get therefrom some good, some little grace,
One kindly thought, one inspiration yet unfelt;
One bit of courage for the darkening skies;
One gleam of faith to brave the thickening ills of life;
One glimpse of brighter skies beyond the gathering mists;
To make this life worth while, and heaven a surer heritage.

*Class Problems*

1. Where was Israel camped during the forty years in the wilderness? Give different views.
2. Why do you think Edom refused to let them pass through their country? What was the result?
3. Give an account of Aaron's death. (Numbers 20: 22-29.)
4. Where was Moab? Why was the king frightened when Israel camped on its borders?
5. Who was Balaam? Balak? Why was Balaam sent for?

6. What did Balaam say to the first messengers? The second?
7. What was his great mistake? The result?
8. What application can we make of this story?

LESSON 23

# MOSES, THE EMANCIPATOR AND TEACHER

Lesson Text: Deuteronomy 6.

Song; Student Reading: Deut. 6:3-5; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Deut. 6:6-8.

Concert Prayer: We are grateful unto thee, our Heavenly Father, for all the truth which has come down to us through the ages. We thank thee for thy servant Moses who knew thee face to face, and talked with thee as we talk with each other, and to whom thou didst reveal the obligations which we owe to thee and to one another. Lest we should forget these sacred duties, wilt thou ever bring them to our remembrance, through thy Holy Spirit, that we may conserve in our lives the best that has been given to the world, we humbly pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee. —Deut.* 6:17.

Explain: 5 All thy soul. 6 In thine heart. 7 Teach them diligently. 8 Bind them. . . . upon thine hand. Frontlets. 9 The posts. 14 Other gods. 16 Tempt the Lord. 20 What mean the testimonies? 21 Mighty hand.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Valedictory of Moses*

The emancipation of Israel was a long, drawn-out process. It took forty years to set them free. No sooner had they reached the Red Sea when their murmurings and complaints began. Pharaoh had pursued them, and it looked for a time as if they might be destroyed. They forgot all that God had done for them in Egypt, and could see nothing but the danger that threatened them. In great anger they blamed Moses for the trouble in which they found themselves: "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness."

There is not much appreciation or gratitude shown in such an expression. They are ready to give up and go back at the first sign of danger. And this was only an example of what Moses had to listen to and endure, off and on, for the next forty years. As we read in chapter after chapter their constant complaints, their everlasting murmuring, we wonder how he stood it. There are times when we really want him to say, "Go on back to Egypt and to bondage; you are unworthy of the freedom which the Lord wants to give you." But he never said anything like that. On the other hand, when even the Lord lost patience, because of their lack of faith, their rebellion and constant complaints, Moses pleaded for them and asked forgiveness for them. Surely he had learned forbearance and sympathy during those long years as a shepherd on the plains of Midian.

God saved them from Pharaoh by opening a path for them through the sea, but they had no sooner celebrated their victory over the king of Egypt on the opposite shore, when fresh trouble arose. First the water was bitter; then they cried for bread; next they demanded meat, and so it continued. As soon as one want was supplied, there was another to take its place. There were times when they actually threatened to stone Moses, because he had brought them out of Egypt.

Then jealousies against Moses were frequent. One leader after another arose to dispute the authority of God's chosen leader. Many conflicts took place within the camp. This lack of unity made it difficult at times for them to withstand the desert tribes that disputed their right to remain in the desert. They were also visited with plagues from which many died, and even serpents in the desert menaced their safety.

The strain of all this must have been terrible for Moses to bear. But he made no complaint. Patiently and with no resentment in his heart he carried his heavy load. As the years passed he shared more and more the burdens of his

office with others, both in temporal and in spiritual matters. And all the time improvement was being made in the character and the disposition of the people. They were learning "obedience by the things which they suffered." When they began their march they were a mob, but through the desert years they were trained and disciplined by the difficulties they encountered. It was a long hard school for them, but in the end they were strengthened because of their experiences.

And now Israel is at the borders of Canaan once more. Not on the south side, but on the east. Their emancipation is complete. Moses, because of an incident which occurred in the wilderness, is not permitted to enter the promised land. Perhaps it is as well that he lay down the burdens of his leadership before the conquest begins. He is old now, and there is need of a younger man to take the responsibility in the difficult work that still lies before them. But Moses has not lost his interest in the people, and he calls them together to receive his last message. He reviews the events of the forty years that are passed; their deliverance from bondage; their disobedience and lack of faith; their trials and sufferings; and all that God has done for them since the day they left Egypt. Then he cautions them in regard to their future conduct, and tells them of the blessings which will come to them if they are faithful to the covenant which they made at Sinai. It is a glowing picture which he paints for them, if they will only serve God and keep the commandments which he has given. But if they fail to do this, then condemnation and disaster will overtake them, and they will lose their inheritance in the good land which the Lord has given them.

They listen with breathless interest. All bitterness and jealousy of their great leader are gone. They see him now in his true greatness and singleness of purpose. For forty years they have lived with him in the wilderness and never fully appreciated him. But now that he is to be taken from

them and is to be with them no more, they realize how keenly they shall miss him, and wonder how it will be possible for them to get along without his constant counsel and advice. So it is with all of us; we never miss those we need and love until they are gone. The children of Israel would have other great leaders, but there would never be another Moses.

To show how lasting were the effects of this final discourse of Moses, we call attention to his instructions concerning the obligation of parents to teach their children the words of the law as contained in our text: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates."

For thirty-five hundred years now the descendants of the people who heard these words have literally carried out these instructions. The ideals which he held up before them that day have served to keep them a distinct and a peculiar people. Through the ages, they have inhabited all lands and associated with all races of people. They have come in contact with the teachings of leaders in every nation and have become acquainted with all the religions of the world, but have remained true to the faith which came to them from Sinai, and the teachings of their great lawgiver and leader, Moses. His words still dominate their lives and actions. They still teach them to their children. They still talk of them when they sit down, and when they walk by the way. These words are signs upon their hands, and frontlets between their eyes, and are written upon the posts of their houses and on their gates.

Truly did the compiler of Deuteronomy say: "There

arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." We at this distant day, as we read the thrilling narrative of his life and labors, feel that we have been in the presence of one of earth's mightiest sons, and there comes to us from this contact the firm conviction that God inspired and enabled him to perform the mighty work he did.

---

*Comradeship With Pain*

Immortal life is something to be earned
By slow self-conquest, comradeship with pain,
And patient seeking after higher truths.
We cannot follow our own wayward wills,
And feed our baser appetites, and give
Loose rein to foolish tempers year on year,
And then cry: "Lord, forgive me, I believe!"
And straightway bathe in glory. Men must learn
God's system is too grand a thing for that.

—Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

*Class Problems*

1. Explain the statement: "It took forty years to set them free."
2. Why were the children of Israel afraid at the Red Sea, when they had seen God's power in Egypt?
3. Why did they complain against Moses instead of God?
4. Name some of the people who rebelled against the authority of Moses.
5. How do you explain the patience of Moses, when the Lord lost patience?
6. Why was Moses not permitted to enter Canaan?
7. Mention the substance of his parting address.
8. What do we know about his death?
9. How does Moses rank among great world characters? Why?

LESSON 24

# JOSHUA, THE COURAGEOUS

Lesson Text: Joshua 1:1-11; 5:10-15; 6.

Song; Student Reading: Jos. 1:5-7; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Jos. 1:8.

Concert Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, there is much for us to do, and we come to thee for help. Wilt thou not leave us nor forsake us in our hour of need. Like Joshua, we have our Jordan to cross, our Jericho to take, and the hosts of Canaan to subdue before we can enter and take possession of our inheritance. Without thy assistance we cannot succeed. Wilt thou give us courage and strength sufficient for the task which thou hast appointed unto us. May we have the comforting assurance that there is no need to fear, for thou art with us, "thy rod and thy staff" are our support. Amen.

*Memory Text: Trust ye in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.—Isaiah* 26:4.

Explain: 1:4 Land of the Hittites. 8 This book of the law. 11 Prepare you victuals. 5:10 On the fourteenth day. 11 On the morrow. 12 Manna ceased. 13 A man. 6:3 Ye shall compass. 4 Rams' horns. 9 Rereward. 17 Accursed. 20 The wall fell down flat. 23 And left them. 25 She dwelleth in Israel even unto this day.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Faith Invincible*

When Moses died, a light went out greater than ever shone in Israel again. No Hebrew prophet or leader, save Jesus only, equalled Moses in all the elements that go to make up true greatness. Great in mind, great in heart, great in character, great in personal influence, great in constructive genius, he stands on an eminence alone among the immortals of that favored race. Joshua was a small man compared with the great Emancipator and Lawgiver. He was not a prophet or one capable of the heights of communion with God that Moses enjoyed, but for the work in hand he was better qualified than Moses would have been. Joshua was a soldier, prompt, energetic, swift in decision and prompt in execution, in fact a general of the first order.

Joshua had been the military leader of Israel from the beginning, and his relationship with Moses had been most

cordial. His respect and reverence for the great prophet had grown with the years, and in every situation he had proved true to the trust imposed in him. Thirty-eight years before he had been one of the twelve spies, and with Caleb had advised an immediate invasion of Canaan from the south. Israel had refused to act on his advice. Now the time had come to make another effort to conquer the land, and Joshua was called by God to lead Israel in their invasion. Moses had approved of the selection and had laid his hands upon his head and blessed him.

There is deep significance and pathos in the final scene when the two leaders parted. Moses was going to his long rest, and Joshua to his great task of conquest. How they must have clung together in that parting hour. And like a continual refrain Joshua must have had ever after ringing in his ears the last words of Moses, "Be strong and of a good courage." He certainly needed all the courage and strength that he could muster, for the *walled cities, the high towers* and the *giants* were still in the land that he was invading.

When the last farewell was said and Moses had gone, Joshua set himself to the accomplishment of his great enterprise. First of all came a comforting message to him from the Lord: "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee . . . Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."

Joshua had a definite thing to do, and here he is given an assurance that he can do it. God promises him success and in that promise he trusted. There was no doubt in his mind of the outcome. The Lord said: "I will be with thee," and that was sufficient for Joshua; the conquest was as good as finished before it was begun.

What a wonderful thing it is to have a definite aim in

life! And how few there are who have it. To be mastered and possessed by an idea is the very essence of success. How can we shoot an arrow strong and straight without a mark to shoot at? How can we be "strong and of a good courage" without something to inspire that courage? How can the Lord be with us unless we are going some place, and know where it is? Joshua had his work laid out ahead. He knew what he had to do, and all obstacles gave way before him. It was not that he undervalued the foe. He appreciated the difficulties, and knew that he would have to fight, but he knew also that God would be with him, which made him irresistible.

But Joshua did not have a monopoly on God. Every boy or girl with a worthy aim, with a noble purpose, may also hear if he or she carefully listens: "Be strong and of a good courage . . . and I will be with thee." With that assurance nothing is impossible. When God is with us, there is no need to fear or be dismayed. And he will always accompany us on a worthy enterprise, if we invite him; and there is no limit to our strength if God is with us. Every one who remembers that will succeed, in spite of a thousand obstacles.

And now let us see how God's promise worked out in the case of Joshua and Israel. The first obstacle was the Jordan river, which at this season of the year was overflowing its banks. Across the river stood Jericho, protected by high walls and armed men, ready if need be to withstand a siege of indefinite length. To cross a large stream such as the Jordan in the face of an enemy is a difficult operation, and not a hint had been given as to how it could be done.

At this point Joshua went out to reconnoiter and think over his plan of campaign. Suddenly he saw the figure of "a man with his sword drawn in his hand." Joshua had no idea who it was, but without a sign of fear or a moment's

hesitation, he challenged the unknown warrior with the question: "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" "Nay," said the vision, "but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come." Joshua had thought there was only two sides —Israel's and the enemy's—but here he learned there was another—the Lord's. He fell on his face to the ground in homage and worshiped his heavenly visitor, while the Lord told him how Jericho was to be taken, not by strength of armed men, but in God's way, which he there revealed.

And now let us visualize if we can the fall of Jericho, for it was one of the most important events in the history of the world, affecting mightily the destinies of mankind. Standing on the spot where recent excavations have disclosed the site of the city in Joshua's day, it is easy to conceive the picture as the Bible gives it. The people of Jericho had known of the approach of Israel for several months. They had heard of their crossing the Red Sea and of their victories over the Amorites and other tribes in the wilderness, and now standing on the walls of the city they could see an enormous body of men slowly moving down the slopes of the mountain of Moab. This must be the army of Israel. It is not surprising that a great fear should have fallen upon the city, or that they should have closed the gate so that *"none went out, and none came in."* All courage left them, and they felt a sense of impending disaster. The dark mass of men moved steadily forward. Nearer and nearer they came. But surely they would stop at the Jordan, with the flood water overflowing its banks. But they crossed over on dry land as if there had been no river. Then the great host began to spread across the plain in the direction of the terror-stricken city.

They were a wild, stern, unkempt folk, clad in rough garments made from the skins of animals, such as men of Jericho had never seen before. Onward they came, ever drawing nearer the doomed city. Upon the shoulders of

four men was borne a mysterious chest of wood overlaid with gold. This was the Ark of the Covenant, constructed at Sinai. It represented the visible presence of Jehovah to Israel, but to the people of Jericho it seemed to be the symbol of death. Before the Ark went seven priests who held in their hands trumpets of rams' horns. As soon as the shuddering city was reached, the quiet of the hitherto silent host was broken by seven blasts from seven horns. Then all was silent again, while the army of forty thousand solemn men marched once around the walls of the ill-fated city.

History records no siege like the siege of Jericho. For seven days of anxious suspense, this skin-clad army of uncouth men kept up their solemn and silent march about the walls of the city, once each day. On the seventh, they marched around seven times. Then without warning there arose from forty thousand throats a sound that hushed every bird and beast of the imprisoned plain. It reverberated from the adjoining hills; it brought the walls of the city to the ground. And Jericho passed from the sunlight of day into the darkness of night.

So Joshua had crossed the Jordan on dry land, and conquered Jericho without a blow; supreme faith had laid low its walls and towers. This was not done by human power; the voice of God was the cannon that made the breach. One moment it stood unharmed, the next it lay a mass of ruins.

---

*The Lord's Captain*

By Jericho's doom'd towers who stands on high
With helmet, spear, and glittering panoply?
"The Christian soldier, like a gleaming star,
Trained in the wilderness to iron war."
Take off thy shoes, thy promised land is found,
The place thou standest on is holy ground.

"Take thou the shield and buckler, stop the way
Against mine enemies! thou my stay!"
I am thy rock, thy castle: I am He

Whose feet have dried up the Egyptian sea:
Fear not for I am with thee; put on might;
'Gainst thrones and powers of darkness is the fight.
—Isaac Williams.

*Class Problems*

1. What is the outstanding thought in this lesson?
2. Compare the characters and ability of Moses and Joshua.
3. Why is the clause: "Be strong and of a good courage," repeated so often?
4. What is necessary in order that we may have courage?
5. What happened at Jordan? Cause?
6. What was manna and why did it cease after Israel crossed the Jordan?
7. What gave to Joshua his great courage?
8. What was the plan of attack on Jericho?
9. Name other men who have shown the same faith that Joshua did.
10. What value does this lesson have for us?

## Lesson 25

# ACHAN, THE TRAITOR

Lesson Text: Joshua 7.

Song; Student Reading: Jos. 7:6-7; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Jos. 7:11.

Concert Prayer: Eternal Father, the same yesterday, today and forever, in whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning, thy pure eye cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. Wilt thou have mercy upon us and forgive us wherein we have displeased thee. We acknowledge our weaknesses and imperfections, but thou art merciful to those who repent, and our hearts are set on thee. We desire to serve thee and keep thy commandments. Wilt thou help us to do so, we humbly pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?—Joshua* 7:10.

Explain: 1 The accursed thing. 2 Ai. 3 People to labour. 5 Shebarim. 6 Put dust. 9 What wilt * * * name? 14 The Lord shall take. 19 Give * * * glory. 21 Babylonish. 25 Shall trouble thee.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Consequences Of Sin*

"And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it." Such was the strict charge which Joshua gave to Israel before they entered Jericho. The spoil of the city must not be touched. It was devoted to the Lord. Every soldier had heard this injunction. Every man knew what he was to do before the walls fell, and what he was to do after the city was taken, and what he was to refrain from doing. It was the Lord who was giving the city into their hands, and he had a right to lay down the conditions to be followed after the victory. There must be no selfish grasping for private gain. Any violation of this commandment would bring trouble not only upon the individual who was guilty, but upon the entire camp as well. That is the trouble with sin. No man can sin to himself alone; others always suffer with him, and sometimes more than he does himself.

In this case, every soldier was true to his trust—every

soldier except one. This speaks well for the discipline of the camp; for there were rich spoils in Jericho, and these soldiers had been without clothing and money so long that it must have been a great temptation when they saw all this wealth. The self-restraint of all the others makes the sin of Achan all the more glaring. What could have induced him to yield to this temptation, when all his fellow-soldiers resisted it? Was this a sudden giving way to sin without any background for support? Hardly. Men do not sin that way. Sin grows in thought and desire, before it flowers into an act. Achan had wanted these things many times before. He had longed for them until when they were before him, in spite of the solemn warning he had received, the impulse to take them was irresistible.

The result was disastrous. When Joshua sent three thousand men to attack the city of Ai, they were ingloriously defeated, and fled in terror, leaving several of their number dead on the battlefield. This was so unexpected by Joshua and the army of Israel that a panic seized them, and they fell down in despair before the Ark of the Lord until evening. Joshua's faith was shaken, for he knew that the men he had sent against Ai were no less worthy than when they compassed Jericho a few days before. And he cried to the Lord: "Alas! O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? . . . O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!" And then came the answer. Israel had sinned, and therefore they had been defeated. They had been untrue to the trust imposed in them to touch none of the spoils. Under a certain tent in Judah's camp was hid a Babylonian garment, a pile of silver and a wedge of gold. This was not much out of the unlimited wealth of Jericho, but it was enough to bring humiliation and defeat on Israel's army.

This is a striking example of how one man's sin may affect the lives and fortunes of thousands. No man lives

to himself alone. Achan's sin is laid at the door of a whole nation. Notice how our text begins: "But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing." Only Achan was the sinner, but all Israel must bear the blame. The soldiers that marched against Ai that day had no more chance of overthrowing the city, than they would have had in forcing the gates of heaven. We may question the justice of the innocent being compelled to suffer for the guilty, but the fact remains. It really admits of no discussion. We see the law operating everywhere. There is no wrong that a man can commit, for which he can bear the punishment alone. Our lives are blended, and the contamination of sin spreads from one to another like a disease, so far as the consequences are concerned.

Achan was apprehended, and it is interesting to note in his confession four steps in his transgression. First, he *saw* the garment, the silver and gold, an objective allurement. He kept his eyes on them; perhaps he even said, "There can be no harm in taking them. The garment is to be burned anyway, and I may just as well have it." That was the first step.

Second, he *coveted* the spoils. Something within cried out for them. The silver and gold belonged to God, but he would not miss so little out of an abundance. So he satisfied his conscience. He was terrified lest someone else would get this choice garment; he must get it first. So the good in him gave way, and evil took its place. How easy it is to fall when we get a good start.

Third, he *took*. This was the fatal step. Up to this time he might have fled from the temptation. But now he had the accursed things in his hands. His will consented to the step he took. His evil thought had become an evil act. He parted company with God. It was no longer a look, a thought, a desire; it was a deed. He had become a thief; he had stolen from God.

Fourth, *they are hid*. Deliberately he arranged to put

them out of sight. They must not be seen. He would share his secret with no one. This shows that it was not simply a hasty impulse that prompted him to take the spoils. He planned to do it, and he planned to keep them. And when events began to happen, and disaster followed disaster, until the whole camp was in mourning, he still kept his guilt a secret, though he must have known that he was the cause of it all. Did he hope to escape? He allowed the lot to take place; and had it fallen on another, he would no doubt have let that other suffer for his sin. Why in those trying hours did he not come forward and confess? Even when suspicion pointed to him out of all Israel, still he held out. Nothing seemingly could move him until Joshua solemnly adjured him to speak; and then the whole miserable story was told. But it was too late to avert God's judgment.

There was nothing to do but take the wretched man with all his household out and stone them to death. And after that they burned them with all they had, as a solemn warning to all future generations, that the end of sin is death. It seems a terrible punishment; but he had brought defeat and death to his countrymen. He had robbed God and nearly brought ruin upon the whole camp of Israel. Surely he deserved his sad fate. To the end of time his name will be associated with the terrible crime for which he was made to suffer, and his deed will serve as a warning to all who may be tempted to commit treason to God and country.

But what about his wife and children? Why was it thought necessary for them to suffer for his sin? We can only say in justification that this was according to the custom of the time. No doubt Israel thought that they had the sanction of God for punishing the innocent with the guilty, if they were members of the same household. The sense of individual responsibility had not yet been born. In the opinion of all people at that time, when a person did an evil thing, the whole family or clan was responsible. The act of one was the act of all. In one way this belief had its ad-

vantages, for there was no police system and the family was expected to control its individual members. This resulted in a sort of primitive justice that made for peace and order. But in such a case as Achan's family, it was cruelly unjust. In time, when there was a government to punish the individual, the idea became intolerable. The great prophet Ezekiel was the first seriously to protest against it, and laid down the truth that every man should be punished only for his own sin, and for no one else's. And that is the rule in all civilized nations today.

---

*Increasing Knowledge*

Truth successively takes shape one grade above
Its last presentment.
Man, therefore, thus conditioned must expect
He could not, what he knows now, know at first;
What he considers that he knows today,
Come but tomorrow, he will find unknown;
Getting increase of knowledge, since he learns
Because he lives, which is to be a man.

—Robert Browning.

*Class Problems*

1. Relate the incident of Achan's trespass.
2. In what way was his sin *disobedience* to God? *Disloyalty? Dishonesty? Treason? Covetousness? Breach of trust?*
3. What were the results of his sin?
4. Do you think that Achan repented of his sin? Why?
5. Give in detail the punishment.
6. Why were his wife and children put to death with him?
7. The writers of the Bible infer that God approved of putting the whole family to death for the sin of one. How do you explain that?
8. What may we learn from this lesson?

## Lesson 26

# JOSHUA, THE CONQUEROR

Lesson Text: Joshua 23; 24:14-28.

Song; Student Reading: Jos. 23:6-8; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Jos. 24:15.

Concert Prayer: Kind and loving Father, help us to realize that the days of our youth are days of fate, days when we must make the great decision of our lives, and choose whom we will serve; to whom we will give our time, our strength, our allegiance, our all. They are our days of dedication, days upon which will depend our future destiny. Vain pleasures entice us; ambition, wealth, fame, the kingdoms of this world and all their glory, are calling us to bow down and serve them. Amidst this confusion of conflicting inducements, may we hear clear and strong the words of Joshua, and have courage to say with him: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." In Jesus' name, we ask it. Amen.

*Memory Text: Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the Lord your God.—Joshua* 23:11.

Explain: 23:4 These nations that remain. 10 One man shall chase a thousand. 15 All evil things (see Deut. 28:15-68). 24:18 Drave out * * * all the people. 19 Ye cannot serve the Lord. 26 A great stone.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Choosing Whom We Will Serve*

When Israel was purged from the sin of Achan, the conquest began in earnest. Ai, the city which at first had defeated Joshua's army, was easily taken and destroyed through a simple strategem. And now city after city fell before the terrific onslaughts of the invincible army of Israel. Joshua proved to be one of the ablest generals of all time. His mind ran naturally in the line of warfare. He had the ability to plan military expeditions, and could devise methods of attack which completely surprised the enemy, and scattered the foe before they knew what had happened. Coalition after coalition was formed against him, but to no purpose. He swooped down upon his enemies like a thunder bolt, and scattered them as if they were chaff. Like an angel of doom he appeared to the terror-stricken Canaanites, who fled before him in every direction.

This went on until practically the entire hill country of Canaan was at his feet, and he apportioned the land among the tribes that had conquered it. It must not be understood, however, that the land was entirely subdued. The inhabitants of the low country, in many cases, could not be driven out, but remained to vex the children of Israel after Joshua was gone. The greatest danger which remained, however, was not military but religious. Finding they were among a people of greater culture than themselves, it was easy for Israel to adopt their ways and methods of worship. Israel, having always been inclined to practice idolatry, soon gave way to it in Canaan. In many cases, they lost their individuality and mixed with the inhabitants of the land, and adopted their ideals and religion.

Before his death Joshua saw this great danger. He realized that his task of conquest was not complete. Israel had come into Canaan for one reason only, that they might cherish and develop the religion of their fathers. Why conquer the Canaanites at all, if they fell into their ways? Joshua saw that it was easier to destroy the enemies of Israel than to keep Israel itself clean, easier to win battles with the sword than to fight sin day by day.

We have all noticed this. Men do some great thing and are acclaimed as heroes. They thrill the world by their bravery—the doing of some heroic deed that mocks at fear. Then, before the echo of their praises dies, they yield to a petty temptation, and lose all they have gained. Many World War heroes whose daring exploits on the battlefield gripped the hearts of humanity, are behind prison bars today because they could not successfully fight the daily temptation to do wrong. It is not the big thing, the spectacular feat, that determines character, but the successful effort day by day to keep the heart pure to God. Israel could wield the sword and destroy cities and kingdoms, but they could not be loyal to the God who delivered them from bondage.

Joshua saw this. He felt more and more how great

was the work that he was leaving unfinished. Canaan had been given to Israel. Jehovah had fulfilled his promise, but Israel had not kept the covenant which they made with him at Sinai. So the old soldier returns from his retirement to battle once more, not for lands or cities, but for the allegiance of the people to the God who led them out of Egypt, and gave them the land of promise. His sword is sheathed, but his voice is raised in pleading for loyalty to Jehovah. He promises that God will expel from the land all the Canaanites who still remain, and Israel shall possess it forever. But they must not turn aside to the right hand nor to the left from the Law of Moses: "That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them: But cleave unto the Lord your God." And then he warns them that if they fail to do this: "God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you." What a promise, and what a warning! Well had it been for Israel, had they heeded his words!

And now we are back to Shechem, back to the place where Abraham built his first altar in Canaan, back to the mountain from which he first viewed the land which God promised to give to him and his seed forever. Joshua has summoned the leaders of all the tribes of Israel to expound to them the words of the Law once more before he dies. The priests tell of the blessings that will come to Israel by observing the Law, from Mount Gerizim; and the cursings, if they forget to obey it, from Mount Ebal. Then Joshua recapitulates the mighty things which the Lord has done for them from the days of Abraham until the present. After this comes his trumpet call for a decision: "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and

put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." They were given perfect liberty to choose whom they would serve, whether they would be God's servants or the servants of Satan; but they must bear the responsibility of their choice.

It must have been an impressive occasion. There stood their great leader, more than a hundred years old, who had heard the call of Moses, while toiling as a slave in Egypt, whose feet had followed the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night through all the wanderings in the wilderness from the day when they crossed the Red Sea, until they entered Canaan; whose sword had always been wielded in their defense until their inheritance was secure, pleading with them to remain true and loyal to God. He stood among them a representative of an age that was past. He had stood with Moses on Sinai when the Law was given, and he would forever bind the nation to that Law and to God with cords that could not be broken. He would make the very stone that heard his words be a witness against them if they should deny their God.

His words were effective, for the people pledged themselves that they would serve the Lord. And Joshua said to them, "Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses." Once more he asked them to put away their strange gods and incline their hearts to the God of Israel. And they replied: "The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey."

So there comes to each of us a solemn hour when we must come to a decision. Down the centuries, forever ringing in the ears of men are the words of Joshua: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." Those words were not alone for Israel. They are for us also. Now, today, this

very hour is the appointed time to make our choice. With Israel let us say: "The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey."

---

*A Precious Day*

There is a precious day,
In youth that day is ours,
When we should dedicate to God
Our life with all its powers.

*Class Problems*

1. Give incidents showing the military geuius of Joshua.
2. How was Ai captured?
3. What was done to the inhabitants of the cities which Israel conquered? Can this be justified?
4. Which portions of the land were conquered? Which remained unconquered?
5. What new danger threatened Israel? How do you account for this?
6. What two meetings did Joshua hold with the leaders? What warning did he give them?
7. What effect did his words have on the people? What came of it?
8. What application can we make of this lesson?

LESSON 27

# DEBORAH, THE PROPHETESS

Lesson Text: Judges 4.

Song; Student Reading: Judges 4:14-15; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Judges 5:20-21.

Concert Prayer: O Lord our God, our help in times of need, as Sisera threatened thy people in ancient days, so do the enemies of righteousness threaten us today. Like Israel of old we are often inclined to give ourselves to the bondage of sin. Help us to realize that link by link our chains are forged, until all our power of resistance is gone, and we lie helpless in our bondage. Before it is too late wilt thou summon us to labor. May we hear Deborah's clarion call: "Up, up, awake! Arise! Lead captivity captive!" And as we respond with all our hearts, "may the stars in their courses fight with us." For Jesus' sake. Amen.

*Memory Text: They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.—Judges* 5:20.

Explain: 2 Hazor. 3 Chariots of iron. 5 Ramah. 6 Kedesh-naphtali. 8 If thou wilt go. 14 Is not the Lord gone out? 19 Bottle of milk. 21 Nail of the tent.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *A Woman's Courage*

Let us stand once more on the summit of Ebal. A hundred years or more have passed since Joshua bade his people farewell, and during that time Israel had forgotten the solemn covenant which they made with Joshua to serve the Lord their God and him only. They could not resist the temptation to worship the deities of Canaan also, for on them they felt depended the prosperity of their flocks and herds. There seemed to have been an idea prevalent at that time, that every land had a local deity who must be propitiated. This led them to adopt many of the immoral and degrading practices of the Canaanites, and the high ideals given them at Sinai were in a great measure forgotten.

And the prophecy which Joshua had made that if they forgot God and turned to the idols of Canaan, he would no longer drive out the people of the land, but leave them as a scourge and a snare to God's people, had been fulfilled. The land was overrun with their enemies; many of the children of Israel were enslaved. There was no stable government,

Every man "did what was right in his own eyes," and anarchy and disorder reigned throughout the land.

Especially oppressive and galling to the children of Israel at this time was the presence of Sisera and a great army in what was called "Harosheth of the Gentiles," with "nine hundred chariots of iron." For twenty years his powerful army mightily oppressed the Israelites, until they lay crushed and helpless at his feet. No one dared raise a hand against him. He held the entire plain of Esdraelon in his grasp, and thus it was impossible for the tribes of the north and south to cooperate against him. Patriotism was dead, and it was difficult to distinguish God's people from the rest of the inhabitants of the land. The fear of Sisera and his nine hundred chariots gripped all hearts, and kept the people in constant terror.

At this critical juncture, when even hope was all but dead, it was a woman who sounded the battle cry to rally. Deborah, a prophetess, carried in her breast faith in Jehovah and his promises to Israel. She saw the distress of the people, and resolved that with God's help she would revive the patriotism of that glorious day when Joshua led his army from victory to victory. She left her native Ephraim and journeyed northward to summon Barak to strike a blow for freedom. Barak was a leader in the tribe of Naphtali, but had never thought of revolting. He consented to lead the army if Deborah would accompany it. He felt that her presence would be an inspiration to the soldiers greater than he could give them. What a tribute that was to Deborah! It meant that Israel's fate depended upon the dauntless courage of a woman. We are reminded of a similar situation in France, when that unhappy land lay crushed beneath the iron heel of England, and all hope of deliverance was gone, how Joan of Arc, a mere girl, revived the spirit of the army and led it to a glorious victory. There have been many times when the destiny of a nation has hung in the balance, and the heroic courage of a woman has saved it.

Six of the tribes responded to Deborah's call to save the land. The others that were not so directly concerned, preferred to let those in the greatest danger do the fighting. They were held up to scorn and contempt in Deborah's song. There are always slackers, and the scathing denunciation they received in this case was well deserved. We still have our shirkers. Public service means sacrifice for the common good, and some people live only for themselves.

And now, going back to the summit of Mount Ebal, we look in a northerly direction and a little to the east and see Mount Tabor thirty miles away. It rises about eighteen hundred feet above the surrounding plain, and it was at the foot of this mountain on the west side that the army of Barak and Deborah gathered. That we may better see the ensuing battle, let us transfer ourselves to the summit of Tabor. While the patriots of Israel are gathering at our feet, we turn our eyes westward and a little south. About sixteen miles away, easily to be seen, is "Harosheth of the Gentiles." Here Sisera with his large army and his nine hundred chariots of iron are gathered. He has heard of the uprising of Israel at Tabor but has little fear, for they have no chariots and their army is much smaller. For twenty years no combination has been able to defeat him, and he goes confidently forth with his chariots in front, backed by a host of footmen with javelins and spears and by archers with bows, to annihilate the presumptuous little army that has dared to raise their puny strength against his.

Up the plain of Esdraelon they march, all keeping step, all ready to make short work of their contemptible foe. But in that army of hastily gathered men there is a power greater than chariots, greater than numbers. It is the solitary figure of a woman. She carries no spear or javelin or other weapon of war. As yet she has uttered no word of command, yet her presence there is a token of the success of that untrained army which is making its stand for hearth and home; for she is the symbol of Jehovah's presence. She is there in

the name of the God of Israel whom Sisera has defied.

And now Deborah watching from an elevated position cried out: "Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoan." And so the march began. Israel's little army all on foot went out to meet the hosts of Sisera, with full faith that Deborah's God would give them the victory. As the two opposing forces met, for a moment darkness covered them, then a tremendous storm of sleet and hail and wind from the east burst over the plain, driving with full force into the faces of the Canaanites. It was impossible for them to fight. No earthly power could stand against such a storm. The blinding sleet, the biting cold disabled them before they could strike a blow, while Israel with the storm on their backs were little troubled by it, and feeling that God was with them, drove against their foes with twenty years of oppression back of their blows. The storm grew worse. The river Kishon became a raging flood and spread over the plain. The chariots stuck fast in the mud, and their drivers were slain. Panic seized the terror-stricken Canaanites, and all the time Israel was mowing them down. The Kishon rose higher and higher, and part of the army was engulfed in its furious torrent. None escaped. The vast army that had so long been the pride and terror of Esdraelon was annihilated.

Sisera alone escaped. Lighting from his chariot, he fled eastward, and reached the tent of Heber the Kenite on a plateau above the Sea of Galilee, where he fell into the hands of Jael, the relentless wife of Heber. She invited him into her tent. He asked her for water, and she was good enough to give him milk. Then she covered him with a cloak. He begged her to stand at the door and watch. She did, but not in the way that he expected. She watched the tired man. When he was fast asleep she stole quietly to his side, with a hammer and tent spike in her hand. Then with one swift blow she drove the spike with such force through his temple that his head was staked to the ground. So perished the

commander, and his dread army, in one of the most important battles in the history of Israel, for it gave to the Hebrews for the first time undisputed possession of the plain of Esdraelon and all central Canaan. The lowland as well as the highland of Palestine was now subject to Israel.

Judged by our standards the murder of Sisera cannot be defended. It was a treacherous and cowardly thing to do. But in that age it met with the highest approval. Deborah sings in the next chapter: "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be; blessed shall she be above women in the tent."

---

*Checking Our Acts*

"N'er suffer sleep thine eyes to close
Before thy mind hath run
O'er every act and thought and word,
From dawn till set of sun.
For wrong, take shame, but grateful feel
If just thy course hath been;
Such effort day by day renewed,
Will ward thy soul from sin."

*Class Problems*

1. Why do you think that Israel so often forgot God?
2. Why was it easier for Israel to conquer the highlands of Canaan than the lowlands?
3. Why did Israel have such a dread of Sisera?
4. What position did Deborah hold? Where did she live?
5. How do you account for her supreme courage?
6. What did Deborah say about some of the tribes that did not rally to her standard? (Judges 5:16-17.)
7. Describe the battle recorded in this lesson.
8. What is meant by "the stars fighting against Sisera?"
9. What did Jael do? Can you defend her action?
10. Why was this battle so important?

## Lesson 28

# GIDEON, THE HUMBLE PATRIOT

Lesson Text: Judges 6 and 7.

Song; Student Reading: Judges 6:12-14; Prayer; Concert Reading: Judges 7:4.

Concert Prayer: Eternal God, Father of all the children of men. Help us to glorify the commonplace. Most of us belong to that great group of people who are called "ordinary." We are without great talent, great ability or great leadership. Help us to remember Gideon, "the least in his father's house," and his great achievement. When days are dark and obstacles block our way, give us courage to struggle on. Help each of us to find thee and walk with thee to victory. We seek not for riches, fame or honors, but only to be numbered among those who believe and trust in thee. Grant us this, we humbly pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text*: *And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.—Judges* 6:16.

Explain: 6:2 Dens * * * and caves. 11 Ophrah. Winepress. 7:1 Harod. Moreh. 19 Middle watch. 25 Oreb and Zeeb.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Three Hundred, Plus God*

Twenty miles north of Ebal and ten miles south of Tabor is Gilboa, also rising above the plain of Esdraelon. This mountain is considerably larger than Tabor, but not so high by three hundred feet. Several events of great importance occurred near and on this mountain. The events narrated in today's lesson took place just north of it in the beautiful valley of Jezreel.

The overwhelming defeat of Sisera put an end to all efforts on the part of the original inhabitants to recover their lost territory. The next event of importance was entirely different. A new enemy threatened the children of Israel. The Midianites invaded Palestine, not to make homes, but to plunder and rob. The entire southern half of Canaan was at their mercy. Finally, a vast horde of them came up from the southeast of the Jordan and crossed at the upper fords and invaded the fertile plain of Esdraelon, and stripped the country bare. The people were greatly impoverished, and

in their desperation they cried unto the Lord for deliverance.

In the midst of their affliction, an unnamed prophet was sent to remind them of their disobedience and idolatry. This led to their repentance, and God sent another deliverer in the person of Gideon, son of Joash of the tribe of Manasseh. He lived in the little village of Ophrah near Shechem. One day while he was brooding over the afflictions of his people, an angel came and saluted him with the words: "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." Gideon was threshing wheat at the time by the wine press in a ravine, to hide it from the searching eyes of the invaders. He did not feel under these circumstances as if the Lord was with him, and said so: "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" The heavenly visitor countered with this startling statement: "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" Gideon like Moses was modest, for he replied: "Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." The Lord insisted and promised to be with him, and that he should smite the Midianites as one man.

But Gideon knew his own limitations, and he hesitated to accept the call. He wanted to be absolutely sure that God would support him. It took a lot of faith to raise his feeble arm against an unnumbered multitude of trained warriors. He asked for a sign that he might know for a surety of God's support, and this was given him. He no longer hesitated or questioned. First he was asked to destroy the altar to Baal which his father had erected, and cut down the grove where it stood. He could see the need of this, for if God was to assist him, he must first cleanse his own household. But it was a hard thing to do, for it meant the immediate alienation of his friends, and the anger of his father. It took real courage to violently strike at the religious life of his home town. But he did it. And as he had expected there was a furious uproar, and Gideon's life was demanded. But his

father saved him. He wisely suggested that Baal should be able to look out for himself. If the fallen god wanted redress, let him kill Gideon himself. This was sound advice and might have been applied with profit during the long sad history of religious persecutions.

But now when it was time for Gideon to lead an army against the Midianites, and he saw the innumerable multitude that he must conquer, his heart again failed him, and he asked for another sign that God would indeed be with him. His request was granted, and still he asked for another. This also was given him. This was sufficient, and he proceeded to carry out his commission. Thirty-two thousand men rallied to his standard, a small number compared to the army of Midian. But to his surprise the Lord said it was too many and told Gideon to give permission to all who were afraid that they might return home. Twenty-two thousand left and only ten thousand remained. These gathered at the foot of Gilboa, while the enemy, "like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seaside for multitude," lay encamped a short distance to the north in the valley of Jezreel.

"And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many." The Lord intended that the victory should be won by faith, and he wanted men who could be absolutely depended upon. A final test was provided. They were to be brought down to the brook to drink, and every man who simply stooped and threw the water to his mouth with his hand, keeping his eye on the enemy all the while, was to be selected, while those who bowed down on their knees to drink were to be excused. Three hundred passed this test; and with this handful Gideon prepared to attack the enemy. He divided his three hundred into three companies, and provided each man with a trumpet, an empty pitcher and a lamp within the pitcher. They were commanded to surround the camp, and at a signal to be given by Gideon, every man was to break his pitcher and hold the lights in their left hands

and their trumpets in their right, and blow with all their might, and then shout: "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon."

Every man did his part to perfection. The Midianite watch had just been changed, and all was still as death, when Gideon's trumpet broke the stillness, and three hundred more rent the air. Add to this the noise of shattered pitchers, and three hundred flashing lights, and mad confusion reigned supreme in the camp of the Midianites. They thought ten thousand men were in upon them, and every man drew his sword against another, thinking he was an enemy. Pell mell they rushed down the descent of the Jordan, shouting and killing each other as they went. All Israel rose to cut them off, and none escaped. Like the army of Sisera, the army of Midianites were annihilated, and were never again heard of as enemies of Israel.

Gideon is a splendid example of how God can use a humble instrument to accomplish a great objective. Like a plague of locusts these marauders afflicted the land of Canaan, and no man among all the leaders of Israel dared challenge their depredations. It was left for an unknown farmer, the least in his father's house, to raise the standard of revolt. Gideon, with three hundred men like himself, plus God, was mightier than all the hosts of Midian.

We reserve our honors for "A" students. Their names figure in the distribution of prizes. Great predictions are made for their future achievements. They are the ones who will "set the world on fire." And all the time the plodding "C" students are overlooked. They belong to the common crowd and no one notices them. So they pass through school "unwept, unhonored, and unsung," and are soon forgotten. They themselves feel that the struggle is useless, and often give up in despair.

This lesson should revive their drooping spirits. A "C" man, who loved his country, struck for its deliverance, and won. Gideon, having first destroyed idolatry in his father's

house, walked out with God to the camp of the Midianites, and they melted away like snow in the summer's sun. And so this "ordinary man" wrote an immortal name higher on the scroll of fame, than any "A" grade man of his day and generation.

---

*A Commonplace Life*

A commonplace life, we say, and we sigh;
But why should we sigh as we say?
The commonplace sun in the commonplace sky
Makes up the commonplace day.
The moon and the stars are commonplace things,
The flower that blooms, and the bird that sings;
But sad were the world, and dark our lot,
If the flowers failed and the sun shone not,
And God, who sees each separate soul,
Out of commonplace lives makes his beautiful whole.

—Susan Coolidge.

*Class Problems*

1. Tell all you can about the Midianites.
2. Do you think that Gideon had considered attacking the Midianites before he received his call? Why?
3. Describe the method of threshing in those days.
4. Why did Gideon demand so many signs before he would comply with God's request? Would you commend his attitude or condemn it? Why?
5. What signs were given him?
6. Why were three hundred men better than three thousand for Gideon's purpose?
7. Describe the test that determined the choice of the three hundred. How did it determine the character of the men?
8. Give a detailed account of the attack and the result.
9. What great lesson do we derive from the story of Gideon?

LESSON 29

# GILEAD, THE COUNTRY EAST OF THE JORDAN

Lesson Text: Numbers 32:1-33.

Song; Student Reading: Num. 32:16-19; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Num. 32:22-23.

Concert Prayer: O Father, help us to know and remember the names and places in that holy land where dwelt the greatest men and women of all the ages. Grant that some day in thy providence we may have the rare privilege of walking over the hills and dales and sacred sites where thy ancient servants left their names and deeds. We would cross the Jordan where Israel walked on dry land, and see the place where Jacob wrestled with an angel till the breaking day, and prevailed. On that sacred spot, we, too, would wrestle with thee for the blessing he received, until we also might hear the blessed words: "for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." Amen.

*Memory Text: And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and withersoever thou sendest us we will go.—Joshua* 1:16.

Explain: 1 Jazer. Gilead. Reuben. Gad. 8 Kadesh-barnea. 9 Eshcol. 14 In your fathers' stead. 15 Destroy all this people. 16 Build sheepfolds. Cities. 23 Sin will find you out. 29 Land of Gilead. 33 Amorites. Bashan.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Land of Gilead*

Coming back again to the summit of Mount Ebal and turning our eyes eastward beyond the deep trench of the Jordan valley, we see a long sweep of country, extending from Mount Hermon on the north to the southern end of the Dead Sea on the south, about one hundred and thirty-five miles. This is what the Bible speaks of as "on the other side of the Jordan," or the Eastern Range as it is now called. Just across the river from where we stand to the east is the fertile and beautiful central portion of this territory, which in Bible times was known as Gilead, a district about forty miles long by twenty miles in width. North of Gilead in what is known as Bashan, or Hauran, the country is a treeless plain, and is famous as a grain producing section. The country south of Gilead is an open, rolling plain, less level than Hauran, but fine pasture land.

There are three rivers that enter the Jordan valley, from the east. (1) The Yarmuk, in the northern part of Gilead, a river almost as large in volume as the Jordan, which runs at the bottom of a deep valley in a winding course from east to west, and enters the Jordan a few miles south of the Sea of Galilee. (2) The Jabbok, further south, but also in Gilead, a river sixty miles long, and flowing between steep hills in a somewhat rapid course, and which, judged by its windings, seems to have difficulty in finding its way to its destination. It empties its waters into the Jordan at a point about twenty-five miles north of the Dead Sea. We mentioned Jabbok in lesson eleven in connection with Jacob. It was on the banks of this stream where he wrestled with an angel of God all night, and refused to allow the heavenly messenger to depart until he had first received a blessing at his hands. (3) Further south still is the Arnon, which crosses the plateau in a deep canyon gorge fifty miles long and empties its waters directly into the Dead Sea.

At the time Israel came up from the south to invade Canaan, this country was inhabited from south to north by the Edomites, the Moabites, the Ammonites and by the Midianites and Ishmaelites, all wandering tribes of the desert. These people were closely related to the Israelites. The Edomites' ancestor was Esau, the son of Isaac and brother of Jacob. The Moabites and Ammonites were descended from Lot, the nephew of Abraham, and the Ishmaelites and Midianites were descended from Abraham's sons, Ishmael and Midian.

When the army of Israel reached the Jordan, the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh, asked of Moses that they might be given their inheritance east of the Jordan, because it was especially adapted for cattle-raising. At first their request did not meet with favor. Moses said to them: "Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here? And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which

the Lord hath given them?" Then he reminded them of the division in the camp of Israel when they were about to enter Canaan from the south, and contended that if they were again divided, it would be impossible for them to possess the promised land.

The two and a half tribes answered Moses by promising that they would build cities for their wives and children and corrals for their cattle, and leave them there, while they went with the army across the Jordan and helped to conquer Canaan, promising at the same time that they would not return "until the children of Israel have inherited every man his inheritance."

This was fair enough, and Moses granted their request on those conditions, but at the same time reminded them that if they failed to do their full duty to the other tribes, "Ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out." They faithfully fulfilled their promise, and when Joshua divided the land and gave to each of the tribes its inheritance, Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh were given the country east of the Jordan.

But the tribes they settled among, though related to them by a common ancestor, proved not only to be bad neighbors, but at times cruel enemies. Bitter jealousies and long-standing feuds led to frequent marauding and plundering expeditions. So, while the country was good, the environment was bad. For this reason Reuben and Gad remained more backward and less progressive than the tribes that settled west of the Jordan.

Because of its greater seclusion, Gilead was able to preserve to a greater extent than the country, either on the north or on the south, the institutions of Israel. During its entire history from the time of Moses to the coming of Christ, it remained quite as Jewish as Judea itself. Marauders from the desert hesitated to invade Gilead, for they were not so safe among its hills, as in the more open country to the south and east. They could not flee so readily from the

inhabitants, who had a better opportunity to be in ambush and surprise them in the inaccessible hills. The Arab may bring his camels among the mountains, but he is in danger if he attempts to use them in the forests, where the branches of the trees spread out in every direction. Thus it comes about that Gilead bears a more important part in Israel's history than the other provinces east of the Jordan.

As we view this choice territory from the top of Mount Ebal, we call to mind several interesting events that took place in this favored province. It was into Gilead that Gideon pursued and overtook the fleeing Midianites, after the panic which he created among them in the valley of Jezreel near Gilboa. Here, too, looms the imposing figure of Jephthah, whose exploits will be related in the next lesson. It was also in Gilead that Saul proved his ability to rule as king by succoring the helpless city of Jabesh-Gilead, when the Ammonites threatened its destruction; a service which the people remembered when they rescued his body from insult and buried it with honor after the terrible disaster at Gilboa. Here, too, David conquered Ammon and Aram of Damascus and brought all eastern Palestine under his rule. So completely did David win the hearts of these people that when the wily and crafty Absalom rebelled against him, it was in Gilead he sought refuge. And here this treacherous and guilty son followed him. The decisive battle between their respective armies was fought in a forest of Gilead. And here, Absalom met the death he so justly deserved. As he was riding through the forest on a mule his long hair caught in the branches of a tree, and the mule went on and left him there suspended in the air. When the relentless Job heard of it, he came and shot him through the heart.

In the days of Jesus, the country east of the Jordan was called Perea, and he passed through it several times. In Perea some of the most touching incidents of his ministry occurred, among others that most beautiful of all Bible

stories, the blessing of little children. Here, too, he told many of his parables; such as the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, the elder brother, the rich man and Lazarus, and several more.

*Class Problems*

1. Locate and give the extent of the country "beyond Jordan."
2. Why did Reuben and Gad ask to remain east of the Jordan?
3. Why did Moses at first refuse their request?
4. On what conditions was their request granted?
5. Describe this country as to provinces, rivers, soil, etc.
6. Name some of the events that have happened there
7. What took place at the river Jabbok?
8. Name the tribes that inhabited this country when Israel came up from the south. What was the character of these people?
9. In what way were they related to Israel?
10. Why was it safer to live in Gilead than in the other provinces to the east of Jordan?
11. Very few of the heroes of Israel ever came from "beyond Jordan." Can you tell why?

## Lesson 30

# ABIMELECH, THE USURPER

Text: Judges 9.

Song; Student Reading: Judges 9:8-15; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Prov. 11:6-7.

Concert Prayer: Our fathers' God, we thank thee for the glorious land in which we live; for the freedom which is our heritage; for the "star spangled banner," women by the blood and tears of our heroic dead. Wilt thou make us zealous for good government, and integrity in those who shall hold public office. As citizens in this great country of ours, into whose hands will be committed its future destiny, may we see to it that only good men shall rule over us; that no "bramble" shall usurp authority because of our indifference and neglect. Heavenly Father, in this our morning of life, may we dedicate ourselves to the perpetuation of every ideal, every principle, every element of government, set forth in the great Constitution of our country, we humbly pray. Amen.

*Memory Text: Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.—Proverbs* 14:34.

Explain: 4 Three score and ten pieces of silver. Vain. 5 Upon one stone. 6 Pillar. 23 God sent. 27 Made merry. 28 The son of Jerubbaal? 29 And he said. 32 The field. 35 The entering of the gate. 37 Plain of Meonenim. 41 Arumah. 46 The tower of Shechem. 53 A piece of millstone. 54 Armourbearer. 55 Men of Israel.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Choosing Our Rulers*

The Bible is a book of light and shade, day and night. Our lesson today is darkest midnight. The first line of our text introduces us to one of the most despicable characters in the scriptures. Abimelech had not one redeeming quality. He was bad through and through, setting the laws of God and man alike at defiance to gratify his inordinate lust for power. And yet, strange as it may seem, this monster in human form was a son of the heroic Gideon, who refused to be king that God might be the ruler over Israel. It sometimes happens that the gloomiest night follows the brightest day; so in this case, the darkest period of Israel's history followed Gideon's long and honorable leadership. In passing from chapter eight to chapter nine, we drop as it

were from glory to shame. What a deplorable sequel this is to the beautiful ending of the previous chapter! It is strange how good men sometimes have the worst of sons.

No sooner was Gideon dead when his degenerate son got busy. His mother was a slave woman of the old town of Shechem, where Abraham built his first altar in Canaan. You will remember that it was situated in the beautiful valley between Ebal and Gerizim. At this time Shechem was a center of Baal worship. It may be, too, that among the mixed population there were jealousies of the position gained by the hill village of Ophrah during Gideon's rule. At any rate, the people there were ready to receive with favor the crafty suggestions of Abimelech, that he be made king. He reminded them that he was their townsman, bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh, and confidently looked for their support.

Gideon left seventy descendants, sons and grandsons living at Ophrah, who had a better claim to succeed him than had Abimelech; but the wily schemer played upon the prejudices of his townsmen so successfully, that they actually voted him seventy pieces of silver from the sanctuary of Baal to finance his enterprise. With this money he lured a band of assassins who marched with him to Ophrah, and surprising his brothers in the house of their father, he speedily put out of his way their dangerous rivalry. One alone escaped; Jotham saw the band coming and, concealing himself, witnessed the execution of the whole house of Gideon except himself. On one stone, perhaps the very rock on which the altar of Baal had stood, that Gideon destroyed, sixty-nine of his sons were cruelly slain.

The Shechemites must have known the unholy purpose for which Abimelech intended to use the seventy pieces of silver they voted him, and now when the bloody deed is done, they are ready to receive him as their king. Being no prophet, he is received with honor in his own city, and they enter into a covenant to serve him as their ruler.

It is really surprising that the other tribes submitted to his usurpation of power without a protest. It shows a most abject state of mind on the part of Israel at this time. After the bloody deed at Ophrah they should have rejected the cruel murderer with loathing, and risen as one man to suppress him. But not a voice was raised in protest. How soon the great work of Gideon was forgotten, even by his own tribe of Manasseh! But that is the way of the world. We see the same thing happen today. Unscrupulous demagogues by flattery and worthless promises win their way to power. Crowds gather to hear them, and shouts rend the air as they did in Shechem more than three thousand years ago. And then comes the awakening: graft, looting of public treasuries, misrule, and all the evils that follow in the wake of misplaced confidence.

In the case of Abimelech, there was not a man of spirit to oppose him in the field. The duped nation, lulled to sleep by his cajolery and their own indifference, must later drink the bitter cup of his misrule in blood and tears. One man, however, appears who has the courage to tell the tribes what he thinks of the coronation. This is Jotham who escaped the slaughter at Ophrah. Standing on the spur of a rock on Mount Gerizim, his voice rings out clear and strong across the valley to Ebal, and a large crowd, assembled to worship, hear his words: "Hearken unto me," he cries, "ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you." Then he tells them in a fable of the trees that went forth to anoint a king—the olive tree, the fig tree, the vine and the bramble. The crown was offered to the first three, and each in turn refused because all were too busy doing their own work. They had no time for anything else. As a last resort the crown is offered to the bramble and accepted readily enough. So the bramble is exalted to be king on the terms that the trees come and put their trust in its shadow.

Then Jotham calls attention to what his father did in delivering them from the hands of Midian. And now they

have risen up against his father's house, and have slain his sons to make Abimelech, the son of his maid servant, king. And what is Abimelech? Is he an olive or a fig tree fruitful and worthy of the honor? Is he a vine capable of honorable service? Not at all. He is nothing but a bramble, a poor groveling thorn bush, good for nothing but to tear the flesh and make men suffer. What has Abimelech ever done worthy of note? He is a contemptible upstart, without moral scruples, ready to wound and destroy the very people who have trusted him. There were those in the crowd who shouted in his honor. Had they altogether forgotten Gideon and the services he rendered his country, that they were ready to fall down on their knees before the wretch who was guilty of slaying the hero's sons in cold blood? They would soon learn to their sorrow what they had done. This was but the beginning. The end would be war to the knife, between Shechem and the man that they had made their king.

Brave speech this, and Jotham did not wait to find out what they thought about it. He took to his heels and fled to the wilderness of Arabia to escape Abimelech, and we hear no more of him. But his words came true. The usurper maintained himself for three years, and then trouble arose. Shechem discovered that it was a viper that they had taken into their hearts, and they rebelled against him. One Gaal, not much better than Abimelech himself, arose to dispute his claim to power, and the people of Shechem were ready to side with him. But they were not well enough organized to overcome Abimelech's army, and he took a terrible revenge. Men, women and children were cruelly slaughtered, and the city was destroyed. A short distance away was a tower or sanctuary to which a thousand people had fled for safety. Abimelech piled branches of trees against the door and set fire to the place. Not one escaped; all were burned to death. Then Abimelech to show his utter contempt for the city where the people "were bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh" sowed the site of it with salt.

At Thebez, a city near Shechem, this monster of cruelty met his death. Abimelech was directing operations against a tower in the center of the city, where the people had assembled for protection. He pressed close to the door in an effort to set the place on fire when a woman cast an upper millstone from the parapet with so true an aim that it broke his skull. Then he called his armorbearer to thrust him through with his sword, that it might not be said that a woman slew him. The young man complied with his request.

We turn from these scenes of bloodshed and cruelty with relief. But there is a lesson for us in this terrible story. The people of Shechem deliberately and of their own free will selected this man to rule over them. They must have known his character; but because he claimed relationship with them and because of town pride, they were willing to sacrifice the safety of their entire confederacy. They were too blind to see that the man who could murder in cold blood the sons of their national hero, could also kill and destroy them, if he pleased to do it. The people of Shechem learned to their sorrow, as many have done since that time, that it is easier to elect a "bramble" to rule over them than it is to get rid of it afterwards.

And this fable of the trees electing a king is also worth pondering over. As long as we have olive and fig trees and vines that refuse to take public office, or discharge their full duties as citizens, just that long will brambles come forward to be our rulers. It is the unwillingness of men of ability and integrity to serve that makes way for the "bramble." This lesson teaches us the need of vigilance, if our liberties are to be safeguarded. We cannot be indifferent to the duties of citizenship, if we are to have good government. And as Jotham appealed to the memory of his dead father who had won the liberty of Israel, so let us remember the heroes who have transmitted to us our glor-

ious heritage of liberty, and resolve that no Abimelech shall ever destroy it because of our failure to discharge the duties of citizenship.

---

*Enemies of the Republic*

Every man who cheats in trade, who lies in politics, who is false in religion; every man who slanders his neighbor at the tea-table for amusement, or his opponent in the newspaper for advancement or for money, he is helping to pull down this Republic our fathers builded.—Gail Hamilton.

*Class Problems*

1. Why does the Bible tell about such men as Abimelech?
2. How do you account for the fact that good men like Gideon have sons like Abimelech?
3. Do you think that Gideon was in any way responsible for such a son?
4. How can we explain Abimelech's ability to deceive the people of Shechem as he did?
5. What great crimes did Abimelech commit?
6. Who was Jotham? What fable did he tell the people of Shechem? What was its meaning? (Different meanings have been given.)
7. Tell about the revolt of Shechem against Abimelech
8. Give an account of Abimelech's death.
9. What is the message of this lesson to us?

## Lesson 31

# JEPHTHAH, THE OUTCAST

Lesson Text: Judges 11.

Song; Student Reading: Judges 11:9-10; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Judges 11:30-31.

Concert Prayer: Eternal Father, we thank thee for the ever increasing light that comes to us, and reveals more fully thy glorious personality. As the years come and go, we understand better and better thy will concerning us, and the duties and obligations which we owe to thee. Thy love for us is more wonderful and deeper than the affection of an earthly father for his children. And in return we give to thee our loyalty, our devotion and our sincerest reverence. Like Jephthah, we dedicate to thee the best we have, knowing as he did not, that thou dost not require any sacrifice on our part which conflicts with the noblest affection which thou hast planted in our hearts. We give to thee, Heavenly Father, our time, our talents, our means. Help us to use them to thy name's honor and glory. Amen.

*Memory Text: Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?* —*Judges* 11:7.

Explain: 3 Tob. Vain men. Went out. 11 Before the Lord. 13 Restore. 20 Coast. Jahaz. 22 The wilderness. 24 Chemosh. 26 Aroer. Heshbon. Three hundred years? 29 The Spirit of the Lord. 31 Whatsoever. 34 Came out to meet him. 37 Bewail my virginity. 40 Lament.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Making of Vows*

We are over the Jordan in Gilead again today, where Jephthah, the subject of this lesson, lived. It is probable that he belonged to the tribe of Manasseh but we are not quite certain. It may have been Gad. He lived in that semi-barbaric period of Hebrew history when there was no stable government. The times were wild and lawless, and "every man did what seemed right in his own eyes." Israel had not yet reached the period of cooperation. Every tribe had to look out for itself when it was threatened by an enemy, and fight for its own existence. At the time when Deborah called for assistance to expel Sisera, Reuben and Gad remained on their side of the river, and left the tribes bordering on the Esdraelon plain to fight the enemy as best

they could. In her song she bitterly condemns them. Of Reuben she said: "Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks?" And Gad she said remained beyond Jordan. And now it is their turn. The children of Ammon are threatening to overwhelm the territory of Reuben and Gilead, and no help can be looked for from the West of the Jordan.

Jephthah had an unfortunate birth. His father's name was Gilead, the same as the country in which he lived, but nothing more is said about him. His mother was not the wife of Gilead, but an Aramean harlot. The legitimate sons would have nothing to do with him. "Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman", they said; and they cast him out.

Driven from home, he became the leader of a band of freebooters and outlaws that lived by plundering caravans and robbing travelers, just as bands of Arabs do today. In this wild life Jephthah became an expert in war tactics, and especially in the art of leading and governing men. Because of his ability as an organizer, and his genius for getting men to do their best, he soon transformed the outlaws who had gathered to his standard into an army of soldiers who could be depended upon to carry out his wishes in any emergency.

Gilead had no leader capable of checking the Ammonites, and in desperation the elders turned to Jephthah and asked him to become their defender. He expressed surprise that they should come to him. "And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?" This was a pretty good answer, and must have greatly humiliated them. It often happens that the "black sheep" is called to save his father's household. Jephthah consented on condition that he should become their leader if he was successful against Ammon. They

readily agreed to his proposal, and called the Lord to witness that they would do according to his words.

Notwithstanding his outlaw life, Jephthah was a deeply religious man. Now that a great responsibility had been given him, he felt the need of divine assistance, and repaired to the tribal sanctuary at Mizpah to ask for God's sanction and blessing. And there before the altar of Jehovah, he registered a vow that whosoever should be the first to meet him on his return to Mizpah, if he were victorious, he would offer as a burnt offering to God. This was in accordance with the heathen beliefs of the time that God must be bought or bribed before he would give him the victory. Jephthah felt that it was his golden opportunity to make or mar his career, and no sacrifice on his part was too great. If he succeeded, it would mean continued leadership; while if he failed, he would remain an outcast.

Jephthah first resorted to diplomacy with the Ammonites, in the hope that bloodshed might be averted. He tried to show them that they had no just grievance against Israel. But they remained obdurate. Now there was nothing to do but fight, and Jephthah boldly led his army southward and attacked them on their own ground. No details of the campaign are given, but we read that Jephthah smote the enemy from Aroer, a city on the banks of the river Arnon, to the Jordan river, sacking twenty cities "with a very great slaughter." The Ammonites were completely subdued.

The report of his victories preceded him, and when Jephthah reached his home in Mizpah, his daughter, with a chorus of maidens, came out to meet him. She was his only child, and the broken-hearted father exclaimed: "Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me." The writer of the account leaves this fact just a simple statement; but it is sufficient. Nothing more could be said that would make it more touching. The overwhelming grief of the father can be imagined with-

out further comment. Our hearts go out to the heroic daughter as the nature of his rash vow is made known to her. Her noble self-surrender and courageous resignation to her fate, that her father's vow may be made good, grip our hearts as does no other incident in the Old Testament. Because the Lord gave the children of Ammon into her father's hands, she feels that her life is a small price to pay. She had only one request to make before the sacrifice: "Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows." To this her father consented. "And it came to pass, at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, *who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed.*"

Because of their horror at the awful deed, some commentators have tried to prove that Jephthah did not carry out his vow. But the narrative says he did, and there is no ground for thinking otherwise. There was nothing abhorrent in that age in such a sacrifice. The enemies of Israel sacrificed their children to their gods to obtain victory in battle. Should Jephthah be less loyal to Jehovah? We shudder now at the very thought of a deed so horrible. But Jephthah acted according to the best light he had, and we admire the hero in his grim determination to hold to the terms of his contract with Jehovah as he understood them. But what adequate tribute can we give to the brave daughter who rises at once to the grandeur of her situation as the instrument that brought about a victory for Israel? By her willingness to die for her father and her country, she reaches the supreme heights of patriotism.

This story clearly sets before us the imperfect notions which people had of God in those far-off days. Jehovah could be bought with a human life to grant victory to Israel. In the opinion of Jephthah, it was pleasing in the sight of God for him to kill his daughter because of his vow. To us this seems horrible. But we must remember that in those

days people were immature morally. They lived up to the light they had, and that is all that should be expected. It would be well for us if we were as true to our ideals of right as Jephthah and his daughter were to theirs. By their loyalty and devotion to their conception of right and duty, they set an example that our generation would do well to follow. Taken at its worst, it was not the slaughter of an unwilling victim. The girl gladly gave her life in the thought that it contributed to the honor of her father and the salvation of her country. It was a pure act of obedience and love, which is the essence of all true sacrifice. The memory of this innocent girl and her heroic death should be enshrined in every heart, for she was akin to him who came in a later day to give his life as a ransom for the sins of the world.

---

*A Loyal Daughter*

Since our country, our God,—oh, my sire!
Demand that thy daughter expire;
Since thy triumph was bought by thy vow—
Strike the bosom that's bared to thee now!

And the voice of my mourning is o'er,
And the mountains behold me no more;
If the hand that I loved laid me low
There cannot be pain in the blow!

* * *

When the blood of thy giving hath gush'd,
When the voice that thou lovest is hush'd,
Let my memory still be thy pride,
And forget not that I smiled as I died!

—Byron.

*Class Problems*

1. Where did Jephthah live? To what tribe did he belong?
2. How did he become a freebooter?

3. What handicaps did Israel have at this time in meeting its foes?
4. Why was Jephthah called to lead Israel against Ammon? What answer did he make?
5. What is a vow? Is it right to make vows? What was Jephthah's vow?
6. Tell about Jephthah's campaign against Ammon.
7. What happened when he got home?
8. What was his daughter's attitude in regard to his vow?
9. How do you account for the fact that Abraham was warned not to kill his son, while no warning was given to Jephthah?
10. What redeeming feature was there in Jephthah's sacrifice?

Lesson 32

# SAMSON, THE STRONG

Lesson Text: Judges 13:1-5, 24-25; 14; 15.

Song; Student Reading: Deut. 8:3; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Deut. 7:6.

Concert Prayer: O Heavenly Father, author of our life and being, give unto us strong and beautiful bodies, not for physical display, or vain boasting of physical strength, but that our souls may have "stately mansions" in which to dwell. Help us to cleanse and keep them free from all impurity. May we hold them in sacred trust as thy gift to us forevermore. In a world soiled with sin and given to iniquity, we need thy help to keep our bodies clean and pure. Wilt thou be mindful of us, and watch over us for good all the days of our lives, we humbly pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: Neither shalt thou make marriage with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.—Deut.* 7:3.

Explain: 13:2 Zorah. 4 Unclean. 5 No razor. 14:1 Timnath. 2 Get her for me to wife. 8 A swarm of bees * * * in the carcase. 11 When they saw him. 12 A riddle. Thirty sheets. 15 Called us to take that we have? 17 Lay sore upon him. 19 Ashkelon. 15:3 More blameless than. 9 Lehi.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Frittering Our Strength*

From the top of Mount Ebal westward toward the Maritime plain we have a good view of the long straight line of the Mediterranean coast from Mount Carmel on the north to the Philistine city of Ashkelon, seventy-five miles to the south. There is neither bay nor natural harbor along the entire coast, only a long line of sand carried in from the sea, which in some places extends inland several miles. That is why no seafaring people ever lived in Canaan. The water of the shore is shallow, so that it would have been impossible for an invading army to land anywhere on the coast. The northern part of the Maritime plain from Mount Carmel to Joppa, forty-five miles, was known as Sharon. It is a level strip of coast from six to twelve miles in width, and rises as it recedes from the sea to the hills

of Samaria. There are two vales that come up from Sharon toward the central highland. The northern of these is the vale of Ajalon where Israel, under the leadership of Joshua, won a great victory over five Amorite kings. During the battle, with poetic eloquence, he commanded: "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon (a city in the valley); and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies."

South of Ajalon a few miles is the vale of Sorek, which extends from near Joppa in a southeasterly direction toward Jerusalem. It was in the village of Zorah on a crest of the hill overlooking this vale that Samson grew up. In our text today we have an account of the miraculous events connected with his birth. One of the promises made by the angel to his mother was that he should begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines, who at that time occupied the Maritime plain south of Sharon. They were a war-like people who exacted tribute from the children of Israel.

This was a great promise to the parents of Samson, and they must have had high hopes for him. No character that we have so far considered had a higher destiny pointed out for him than did Samson. But as he grew up, he seems to have been more attached to the olive-groves and gardens of the Philistines than to the highlands of his own people. Like Esau, he was more intent on having a good time than in preparing himself for the mission which God had marked out for him. When he reached manhood he became enamored by the charm of a Philistine maiden who lived at Timnath, just over the hill south from Zorah.

Samson's parents could not have been very careful in training their boy. Perhaps they thought that because of the promise that the Lord had made concerning his future, there was nothing for them to do except watch and wait. If that was their idea, they certainly made a great mistake.

God gives parents children, but he expects them to do their duty in bringing them up. There is a responsibility that attaches to parenthood, that even a child of promise cannot absolve them from discharging. In Samson's case, there can be no question but what his parents were over-indulgent and let him have his own way until they lost all control over him.

When Samson came to his father and mother and practically demanded that they make arrangements for his marriage with the Philistine, they feebly protested: "Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" Samson answers this by saying: "Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well." That settled it; the father went and arranged for the marriage, according to the custom of the time. If Samson had been living today, he would have taken matters into his own hands, and perhaps never have mentioned the marriage to his parents at all.

It was no doubt in a merry mood that Samson set out for Timnath on the day of the wedding. It seemed that on a previous occasion he had killed a lion with his hands when it *"roared against him;"* for by this time he had become the strongest man in Israel. And now he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, "and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion. And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating." When he came to the scene of the festivities he proposed to the thirty young men who were in attendance that he would tell a riddle, and if they could solve it in seven days, he would give each of them a linen garment; and if they failed to tell the answer, he was to receive thirty linen garments from them. They told him to put forth the riddle. And he said to them: "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness."

But when, after three days, they were unable to guess

the riddle, they went to Samson's wife and demanded that she wrest the secret from him, threatening, if she refused, to burn her father's house. So she either through fear or deceit went to Samson and wept before him, and said: "Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me." At first he refused to tell, but day after day she kept up her weeping and whining until on the seventh day he told her, and she told it to the young men. And on that day before the sun went down, they came to Samson, and said: "What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion?"

Of course he was not blind to what had happened, for he said to them: "If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle." Samson proved himself a good sport, however, even though his method of obtaining the promised garments was rather a questionable one; for he went down to Ashkelon and slew thirty Philistines and brought back their wearing apparel to adorn the backs of the young rogues who had outwitted him.

But Samson was angry and much displeased with his wife's conduct. So he went back to his father's house at Zorah until he had time to cool off a little. Then he returned to Timnath to seek a reconciliation with his wife. But his father-in-law, in the meantime, had given her to one of his companions. When Samson heard this he became very angry and determined to wreak vengeance on the whole Philistine tribe. He caught three hundred foxes and, turning them tail to tail, fixed a firebrand between each two tails and sent them into the standing grain of the Philistines and burned up both the shock and the standing corn.

The result was that the Philistines became very much wrought up over the affair. They took vengeance on Samson's father-in-law and his family by burning them to death. For this Samson vowed that he would be avenged, and he

smote them with a great slaughter. Then he went and dwelt in the cave of a rock at Elam, a few miles southeast of Zorah.

This did not end the affair, however, for the Philistines went up and spread themselves against the Israelites. And the men of Judah, in order to compromise the matter, agreed to deliver Samson bound into their hands, for at that time the Philistines ruled over Israel. This willingness to give up the man who might have saved them from their bondage to the Philistines, shows how timid and cowardly they were. Three thousand men of Judah went to get Samson from the rock. With that number he might have delivered Israel, but instead of that he was willing to be returned to his enemies. He only exacted a promise that they themselves would do him no harm. To this they agreed, and they delivered him bound to the Philistines.

But when they "shouted against him," he seems to have taken it as a personal affront, and he snapped the new cords with which he was bound, and finding the jawbone of an ass, he "*put forth his hand* and took it, and slew a thousand men" with this formidable weapon. We may assume that the rest fled, for Samson seems to have been left alone after that.

It will be noticed that all Samson's exploits were single-handed. He made no effort to unite Israel against the Philistines, or even to lead his own tribe of Dan to attack the enemy. He was actuated solely by personal and selfish motives, rather than by love of country or God. He seems to have no love or sympathy for his people. He furnished good material for the story-teller. There was an element of humor in his dealings with the Philistines, and the clever way in which he turned the tables on their efforts to entrap him. But his personal character was in every way unworthy, and it is hard to see any good that he did, either to himself or his country.

Love alone is strength!
Might that is not born of love
Is not might born from above.
Has its birthplace down below
Where they neither reap nor sow:
Love alone is strength!
Love is stronger than all force,
Is its own eternal source;
Might is always in decay,
Love grows fresher every day:
Love alone is strength!
—George MacDonald

*Class Problems*

1. Relate the incidents connected with Samson's birth.
2. What reasons have we for thinking that his parents failed in his education?
3. Why did he ask his father to make arrangements for his marriage? What objections did his father make?
4. What riddle did he propound to the Philistines?
5. Why did Samson leave his wife?
6. Tell the story of the foxes.
7. What evidence have we of the servility of Judah in this lesson?
8. What happened when Samson was delivered bound into the hands of the Philistines?
9. Name some of the defects in Samson's character.
10. How are we guilty of the same weaknesses?

LESSON 33

# SAMSON, THE WEAKLING

Lesson Text: Judges 16.

Song; Student Reading: Judges 16:19-21; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Judges 16:28.

Concert Prayer: Heavenly Father, may we learn from the great tragedy of Samson the weakness of the strong. Help us to see that mere physical prowess, without moral courage and spiritual endowment, is weakness, that largeness of body and size of limb, is no true measurement of strength. They alone are strong who walk with thee. Thou art our strength and our salvation. With thee all things are possible, and without thee we can do nothing. Wilt thou, our Father, be merciful unto us and save us from the weakness of Samson. Amen.

*Memory Text: Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.—I Cor.* 3:16-17.

Explain: 1 Gaza. 4 Sorek. 5 Pieces of silver. 7 Green withs. 15 Thine heart. 19 Afflict. 20 Departed. 23 Dagon. 25 Made them sport. Between the pillars.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Profaning Our Destiny*

We read at the end of the fifteenth chapter of Judges that Samson judged Israel twenty years, but just what is meant by that statement is hard to say. Nothing is told of these years, and we may well conclude that nothing happened worth telling. Whatever he did during that time it seems certain that he learned nothing from his past experiences with the Philistines. The women and cities down there continued to attract him. When the story opens again we find him down in Gaza, where he was discovered by his enemies, and they shut the gates of the city on him, with the intention of killing him the next day. Samson must have learned of their plans, for at midnight he arose and took the doors of the gates of the city and the two posts and carried them away on his shoulders, "bar and all," to the top of a hill on the way to Hebron. This prank undoubtedly exasperated the Philistines quite as much as it amused Sam-

son. What a man he might have been if he had directed his strength to some useful end! But such pranks only increased the resentment of his enemies, without in any way helping his own people.

Up to this time, Samson had gone through life in a happy-go-lucky sort of way, without meeting with any serious disaster. His great physical strength showed no sign of abating, but all the time he was losing his moral fibre. Every day he was slipping nearer to the brink of ruin. Without a thought of his country and its sore distress, he went on in his care-free way, with no desire but to gratify his own selfish whims. With that attitude toward life and its sacred obligations, a Delilah was bound to come sooner or later to complete the ruin. And now she came.

Induced by a promise of rich reward from the Philistine lords if she would discover the secret of his strength, she deliberately sets about her task by such wiles as are known only to women of her kind. Poor Samson, in the hands of such a woman, was helpless. Three times she tried to draw from him the precious information, and three times he held out by telling her a lie. But with unholy persistence Delilah continued her efforts. It was an unequal contest. Samson had dallied with temptation too long to hold out against so wily a foe. He knew that she intended to betray him, and yet he was so helpless in her coils that he could not rouse himself in defense of his own honor and manhood. Could anything be more pathetic? This giant man, who might have been numbered among the great deliverers of Israel and a hero of the true faith, sold himself and his precious gift for less than Esau received for his birthright.

Asked the fourth time by his temptress for the secret of his strength, he still put her off; but she continued daily to press him with her words and urge him, until he could hold out no longer, but "told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: *if I be*

*shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man."*

The rest of the tragic story is soon told. She made him sleep upon her knees, and called for a man to cut off his locks of hair, and he was a Hercules no more. Again he heard the challenge: "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson;" and he rose determined to resist them as before. But it was useless; his hair was gone, his vow broken. He was helpless in the hands of his cruel foes. He grappled and handled himself as in times past, but nothing came of it. His strength was gone. They bound his great limbs with fetters of brass! Then they put out his eyes and thrust him into a prison house, and forced him to grind at their machines.

How low the great can fall! Samson, whose coming to earth was announced by an angel, proclaimed as the deliverer of Israel from the tyranny of the Philistines, now forsaken by God, the sport of his enemies! Completely ruined and utterly beaten, he is the saddest sight, the most pathetic picture in the Bible. We pity the sufferings of Job on his ash heap, we are sorry for Jeremiah bemoaning his fallen country and the captivity of his people, but at the same time we glory in their heroism. They are sublime in their sufferings. But Samson, blind, broken and in prison, taking the place of a donkey to grind the corn of his enemies, what can we say for him? We can only weep for his folly. He dragged his own honor, the honor of his country, and the name of his God, in the mire. To gratify his selfish appetites and desires, he turned the joy of his father and mother at his birth into mourning when his manhood was reached; he made the word of an angel untrue, by refusing to fulfill his destiny as the savior of his country.

Compare Jephthah and Samson. The man of Gilead looms a giant beside the pigmy of Zorah. One born in shame and driven from his home an outcast; the other, God's special gift to his parents, is honored as the coming savior of his people. But the man whose destiny has been

announced by heaven, falls from his high estate, while the outcast rises to the very pinnacle of patriotism by the sacrifices which he made for his country.

As time went on, however, Samson began to recover from the blow. As his shorn locks grew again, the old vow came back to renew itself in his soul. His physical eyes were gone, and they could not be restored. That was the penalty he had been compelled to pay for his dishonor, but a light came to him in the darkness. His inward sight became keener, and he saw God in the night, better than he had seen him in the day. Perhaps he might still strike a blow against the enemy that had so long afflicted his people. The Philistines saw him bent and blind and helpless, as he ground at the prison mill, but they could not see his expanding soul. They never suspected that he was still to be reckoned with as an enemy. Had any one told them to beware of him, they would have laughed.

At length the day came when his hair was grown again. But this was not noticed by his tormentors. They had forgotten the source of his former strength. A great festival was called in honor of Dagon their god, and the poor blinded hero was brought to the temple to make sport before the Philistine multitude that had assembled. They laughed at him, jeered and mocked him, and sang a song in praise of Dagon, the conqueror of Jehovah and of Samson. This was too much. They had gone too far. Suddenly there came to Samson the consciousness that his strength had returned to him; and then a quick resolve. What time so opportune as at an idol's feast, what place so fit as a heathen temple to strike one more blow against his life-long enemy, even though it might cost him his life.

The house was full of men and women, and three thousand people were on the roof, and all the lords of the Philistines were there, while Samson made sport for them. And Samson prayed: "O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God,

that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein: so the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

And so Samson perished with his enemies. His kindred came and recovered the body amid the chaos of the wrecked temple, and laid the mighty frame to rest near his father Manoah. We could have wished that his last prayer had been for his people rather than revenge for his two eyes. But at any rate Israel profited by his heroic death, for the Philistines were crushed by the fall of their temple and god, and thousands of their people, and it was a long time before they recovered from the shock.

---

*Weakness of Strength*

Whom have I to complain of but myself?
Who this high gift of strength committed to me,
In what part lodg'd, how easily bereft me,
Under the seal of silence could not keep,
But weakly to a woman must reveal it,
O'ercome with importunity and tears.
O impotence of mind, in body strong!
But what is strength without a double share
Of wisdom? Vast, unwieldy, burdensome,
Proudly secure, yet liable to fall
By weakest subtleties; not made to rule,
But to subserve where wisdom bears command.
God, when he gave me strength to show withal
How slight the gift was, hung it in my hair.

—Milton.

*Class Problems*

1. What was the great weakness of Samson?
2. Tell about his adventure in Gaza. Where was Gaza?
3. What was the character of Delilah? What was her nationality?
4. What was her reason for betraying Samson?
5. Give the details of how she succeeded.
6. Why was Samson's fall particularly sad?
7. Compare Samson with the other judges of Israel.
8. What did the Philistines do with him?
9. Do you think that his strength returned simply by his hair growing again? Why?
10. Give in detail the story of his death.
11. How did he show selfishness in his last prayer?
12. What class of people are like Samson today?

Lesson 34

# RUTH, THE MOABITESS

Lesson Text: Ruth 1 and 2.

Song; Student Reading: Ruth 1:19-22; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Ruth 2:12-13.

Concert Prayer: O God our Father, thou hast preserved for thyself a witness through all generations. We thank thee for the sacred scriptures which testify of thee, and for our daily contact with the truths which they contain. We are especially grateful for the story of Ruth, and for the example of loyalty and devotion to a great ideal which her life exemplifies. Help us, our Father, when we come to the "parting of the ways," and must make the great decision of our lives, to remember her immortal words of consecration, that we may have courage to follow her example, and make our choice with thee and thy people, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Memory Text*: *Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.—Ruth* 1:16.

Explain: 1:1 Bethlehem-judah. 2 Moab. 8 Mother's house. 20 Mara. 2:8 My maidens. 9 Young men. 13 Let me find favour in thy sight. 15 Glean. 17 Ephah.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *"The Parting of the Ways"*

The books of Joshua and Judges are full of battles and war songs. And when we come to Samuel it will be the same. Men hate and lie and steal and murder and strive against one another, until our hearts grow sick of their barbarity and inhumanity. As we read these sordid stories, it is hard to believe that God had anything to do with the men whose awful deeds are recorded. But we must always remember that God had to use such instruments as he had for the accomplishment of his purposes. He selects the best men he has in every generation to do his work. The judges had their moral defects, but these were defects of their times, and they were God's men for the work they did. They acted according to the light which they had, and strove for greater light, which came to them slowly. God could not ask for more, and he used them to do the work that needed to be done in those dark days.

But after all this war and tumult, it is a delight to come to the book of Ruth, with its wonderful story of love and home life. There is much that is akin to divinity in the heroine of this story. She fills the Old Testament with a fragrance that we never forget. Ruth came from a land of idolatry, from a people that was ever the enemy of the children of Abraham. You remember Balak, king of Moab, how he hated and feared Israel and tried to destroy them as they came up from the southern desert, by luring Balaam to come and curse them. Again and again Moab warred against Israel, and the two nations never became friendly. But whatever may have been the sins of Moab, the fact remains that it was Ruth's home and country, and no land or people ever gave to the world a finer or more perfect type of womanhood.

Ruth draws all the world to her feet by her love and unselfish devotion, her consecrated service and her maidenly modesty. She is a favorite theme for the preacher's discourse, and the poet instinctively turns to her for inspiration when love and goodness are throbbing for expression, and he fancies that he hears a strain:

"Perhaps the selfsame song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn."

Young and old find keen delight in this simple story of love and loyalty. It has a universal appeal, for human hearts are pretty much the same everywhere. No one can read these four short chapters without being better for the reading.

We see Ruth standing at the ford of the Arnon, on the northern boundary of Moab, and by her side, her mother-in-law, the broken-hearted and poverty-stricken Naomi. And her sister-in-law Orpah is also there. Naomi is going back to her old home in Bethlehem, and this is the hour of parting. Moab has taken from her all that she had when she came—her husband, her two sons, and their property. Now she is old, and there is nothing left for her but to return

and die among her own people. Her alien daughters have accompanied her this far on her way. And now she bids each of them to return to her mother's home, praying that God will deal kindly with them, as they have dealt with her dead sons and with her, and prays that each may find rest in the home of another husband. Then she clasps them in a last embrace, and kisses them. All three give way to tears, and their voices are heard in weeping. Seeing her deep sorrow and loneliness, both girls protest: "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people," they said.

This was most generous, but they do not realize how great the sacrifice would be on their part. Israel is a clannish nation; they would meet with rebuffs and unkindness. So Naomi breaks to them, as gently as she can, the sad fact that they can expect no welcome among her people. No one would care for them except herself. This brings to each of them a crisis. If they persist in going, all their family ties must be severed. They must not only give up their home and people, but their god; and what would be gained by going? No home, no prospect of another marriage, nothing but hardship and loneliness. Naomi had painted the picture so dark that there was no light ahead; only by going back was there any prospect of peace and contentment. Orpah is the first to decide. She kisses Naomi again, and turns back to her home and kindred.

But Ruth hesitates. She clings to her mother-in-law. Naomi gently reminds her that Orpah has gone. "Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods; return thou after thy sister in law." Ruth at this moment is at the "parting of the ways." It is the great crisis of her life. Rebekah when she decided to leave Haran was going as the prospective bride of the rich Abraham's son. She would be welcomed by the whole household of the great Patriarch. But no such welcome awaited Ruth. If she went, it would be to a strange land and an alien people.

RUTH AND NAOMI

So far, she had walked in loving companionship and sympathy with Orpah. Together they had married an Israelite husband, and together they had bowed under the stroke of widowhood. And now Orpah had left her.

Why does she hesitate? Behind her is Moab with all its sacred memories, the home of her childhood, her father and mother, her friends, all the ties that bind her to the past. And what is there ahead of her? Israel. Across the Dead Sea to the west, she sees the dark forbidding hills of Bethlehem, at the foot of which are the alien faces that she must meet, and the unknown trials that await her. What calls her to that strange land? To outward seeming, nothing. Ease and comfort are behind her, and even Naomi urges her to return to the home where love and laughter are waiting for her.

But Ruth does not return, for standing by her side is Naomi, old and poor and lonely; and Naomi was the mother of the man she loved. In that desolate widow's face she sees a likeness of the husband who is dead. Nay, more; she sees in it the symbol of her husband's faith. There comes surging through her soul a great resolve. What are the ties of people and kindred compared to the call of duty and the gripping power of love. Ruth refuses to leave Naomi. What matters hardship, trials, suffering, even the hatred of others, so long as she has the privilege of loving and serving the mother of her husband. With suppressed emotion, she threw herself on the withered breast of the woman beside her, and gave utterance to the most thrilling confession of love and devotion ever uttered:

"Entreat me not to leave thee,
Or to return from following after thee:
For whither thou goest, I will go;
And where thou lodgest, I will lodge:
Thy people shall be my people,
And thy God my God:

Where thou diest will I die,
And there will I be buried:
The Lord do so to me, and more also,
If ought but death part thee and me."

These immortal words have echoed through the ages as the most perfect expression of love and duty ever uttered, and Ruth seems to have flung them on the mountain air of Moab without a moment's effort. Ruth has made the great decision of her life. Come weal or woe, she was ready to embark on a great adventure of faith, worship her husband's God and serve with a true daughter's devotion the woman who bore him. What a character Naomi must have been to win from Moab and Moab's god the undying affection and loyalty of a woman like Ruth!

And what destiny awaited this choice daughter of an alien land in Bethlehem and Israel? Did she find all hearts closed to her as Naomi had predicted? Did the people pass her by with a haughty stare? No, indeed. How could such devotion and love as hers remain unnoticed? Her willing service to Naomi, her beautiful womanly courage made it impossible. When they reached Bethlehem, it was at the beginning of harvest, and since they were poor, Ruth volunteered to go out in the field and glean after the reapers. So she began to work at this lowly task, and it happened that she lighted on the field of Boaz. At noon this rich kinsman came to the field and saw her. On inquiry he learned who she was. It must have been that her kindness and devotion to Naomi had been told to him, for he spoke kindly to her.

She asked permission to glean after his reapers. He willingly granted her request, and showed her the utmost courtesy and respect. Her grateful acknowledgment of his kindness is beautifully told: "Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" And he in turn gave

her to understand that he had heard of her willing sacrifice, her love for Naomi; and said to her: "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."

And so this first Gentile convert finds friendship among God's people. She looked for a stone, and they gave her bread; she expected loneliness, and found a home; she expected to remain single, and found a husband in the sturdy, God-fearing Boaz. She never even dared to hope that motherhood would come to her, but God blessed her with a son through whom came David the "darling of Israel." And Jesus proudly traced his descent from this immortal poet king. Ruth, without seeking for it, or expecting it, found fame and glory in the path of love and duty. So may every one who conquers self and dedicates his life to the service of others, find the highest and the best that life can give.

---

*The Path of Duty*

The path of duty is the way to glory;
He that ever following her commands,
On with toil of heart and knees and hands,
Through the long gorge to the fair light,
Has won his path upward, and prevailed,
Shall find the toppling crags of duty, scaled,
Are close upon the shining table-lands
To which our God himself is moon and sun.

—Tennyson.

*Class Problems*

1. Who were the members of Naomi's family, and why did they go to Moab? What happened there?
2. Orpah has been condemned for going back. Is that fair without knowing her motives? Discuss

3. What were the motives that led Ruth to accompany Naomi to Bethlehem? Why is she praised more than Orpah?
4. What do you think was the motive of the writer in the book of Ruth?
5. How far was Moab from Bethlehem? What was the probable route taken to reach Bethlehem?
6. How do you account for the presence of the two girls with Naomi, after their husbands were dead?
7. What was the function of a "near kinsman" in Israel?
8. In Ruth 3:9 we read: "Spread therefore thy skirt over thy handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman." What does that mean?
9. What great lesson may we learn from the story of Ruth?

LESSON 35

# SAMUEL, THE CHILD

Lesson Text: 1 Samuel 1; 2:18-19; 3.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Sam. 1:11; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 1 Sam. 1:27-28.

Concert Prayer: O Lord, we thank thee for the many blessings that we have received from thy hands. We are especially grateful for our mothers. Help us to be worthy of the love and affection which they constantly shower upon us. We know that we are their joy, their hope and their very life. Above all things they would have us know thee and keep thy commandments. O Father in heaven, help us to do this, to walk in holiness before thee, to love and serve thee as long as we shall live upon the earth. We would be like Samuel and "minister before thee," so that when thou shalt call our names, we may hear thy voice and answer as he did, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth."

*Memory Text: And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.*—1 *Sam.* 3:19.

Explain: 1:1 Mount Ephraim. 3 Shiloh. 5 A worthy portion. 6 Her adversary. 7 Did not eat. 9 Eli the priest. Upon a seat by a post. 16 A daughter of Belial. 21 His vows. 22 Until the child be weaned. 23 His word. 24 Three bullocks. 28 Lent. 3:1 Precious. 3 Ere the lamp of God went out. 13 Made themselves vile. 19 Let none of his words fall to the ground. 20 Established.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Speaking With God*

We are entering today upon a new era in Israel, an era of greater national unity and a stronger central government, opening with the priest Eli exercising authority from the sanctuary at Shiloh. Just how this transition from the turmoil and strife of Judges, when "every man did what was right in his own eyes," came about, we do not know. Perhaps the constant menace of the Philistines had drawn the people together to combat a common danger.

Shiloh was a small village about ten miles south of Shechem, and the same distance north of Bethel. It had been a sanctuary from a very early period. After his conquest of Canaan, Joshua moved the Tabernacle and Ark from Gilgal, between Jericho and Jordan, to Shiloh, and made his headquarters there. At the time of Eli, the Taber-

nacle had been replaced by a solid wooden building, which contained one large room for the Ark, and an outer court for the worshipers. In front of the building was a seat for Eli where he officiated as a judge in settling disputes, and giving advice to the people in much the same way as Moses did when Jethro visited him in the wilderness.

Living at Ramah, about fifteen miles east of Shiloh, was a man named Elkanah and his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. It was customary for this family to go up to Shiloh at least once each year to worship and offer sacrifice to the Lord. On one of these occasions an event occurred which greatly affected the future destiny of Israel. Hannah up to this time had been without children. This was not only a disappointment to her but it seemed to imply, according to the prevailing belief, that God was displeased with her. To make matters worse, Peninnah, who had several children, took every opportunity to reproach Hannah with her childless condition. Her husband tried in an awkward way to comfort her. When he saw her weeping and knowing the cause, he asked: "Why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?" But even the best of husbands cannot take the place of a son, for only through children can women generally hope to influence the coming ages.

In her trouble Hannah went to the Lord at his sanctuary. "And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head." Eli who was sitting near, and seeing her lips move, thought she was drunk, and reproved her. But she explained to him what she was really doing, and he sent her away with a blessing: "The

God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him."

To that fervent prayer Samuel was the answer. When he was three years old, Hannah went back to Shiloh with her son, and said to Eli: "Oh, my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshiped the Lord there."

We marvel at this heroic mother, who, without the least hesitation or one regret, gave into the keeping of another the precious son that God had given her in answer to her fervent prayer. But her vow had been given, and must be sacredly kept. She told God's priest that she was lending her son to the Lord as long as he should live. What a beautiful way of expressing the consecration that she was making! It was only a loan. Samuel was still her son, but dedicated to God during his lifetime. And did ever a mother have more cause to rejoice in her self-denial than did Hannah? Samuel became one of the greatest men in sacred history. He was really the maker of Israel as a nation. By his life of good deeds and fellowship with God, he placed upon the brow of his mother an immortal crown. She stands to this day as the highest type of consecrated motherhood.

But Hannah is not alone; every son who reads her story, has a mother who is just as anxious that he shall live a life of consecrated service as was Samuel's mother. Mothers' hearts today are the same as they were in that day. Thousands of prayers ascend daily from the mothers of all Christian lands, that the sons and daughters of this generation may live with God as did Samuel. But their prayers can never be answered unless the mothers and children do their part. God cannot work alone, even in so worthy a cause.

It is of the utmost importance that children enter into the service of the Lord early in life. The great captains of industry and business find it difficult to train or use men of mature years. They want boys who will grow up with the business. So with the Lord. He calls for boys and girls "to grow up with *his* business," if they are to become great in his service. Samuel went as a child into the house of God. Jesus at twelve was in the temple, "about his Father's business."

That first experience which Samuel had with God is interesting. We read that he ministered unto the Lord, "And the word of the Lord was *precious* in those days; there was no *open* vision." "Precious" in that sentence means "rare," and "open" means "frequent." Then it was that God called Samuel. It was in the night, and Samuel was sleeping in that holy room where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, when a voice awakened him. Thinking it was Eli's, he ran to his side; but Eli had not called. Again he heard the voice, and he hastens to the priest, and is sent back with the same statement. A third time the voice calls; and the dutiful Samuel responds as before, but this time he receives a different answer. Eli, perceiving that it was the Lord's voice that had awakened Samuel, said to him: "Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth."

When the fourth call came, Samuel answered as the priest had suggested, and the Lord revealed to him what should shortly come to pass in Israel. In the morning Eli wanted to know what the Lord had said to him during the night. Samuel held nothing back, but faithfully told him all that he had heard. It was a sad message for Eli, for because of the wickedness of his sons, it meant the destruction of his house. He was in a way prepared to hear it, however, for he had received a previous warning. From that day Samuel grew in favor with God and man. "And

all Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord."

The expression is often heard from young people of our day, "We don't want to miss anything." By that is meant that since youth comes but once, all sensual desires and appetites should be gratified during that precious time. It is soon enough to be serious when youth is passed and middle life comes on. No more fatal mistake can be made by young people than to think that they can indulge in a period of transgression, without having to pay the penalty. What a fallacy it is to suppose that wild oats must be sown to get the most out of life. The harvest of life comes from the seed we sow. We cannot sow "wild oats," and reap a harvest of golden grain. As we sow, so shall we reap. Even the repentance of later years can never heal the scars that will always remain of our wayward years.

There is no more beautiful or glorious thing in life than youth, if it hears God's call, and like Samuel answers: "Speak; for thy servant heareth." A youth dedicated to God is the glory of humanity. And Samuel is a shining example of that glory. From his earliest childhood he lived in an environment of holiness, an environment that God delighted to visit, for it was his sanctuary. And that is where every boy and girl may find God, if they seek him humbly and persistently.

Samuel in the house of God at Shiloh is a beautiful picture. The charm of it never leaves us. We see him there ministering to the Lord. Every year when his mother comes up from her home in Ramah to worship, she brings a coat and other clothing for her boy, and no doubt inquires of the priest concerning his welfare and conduct. And always it is a good report that she receives. Such a mother and such a boy in such a place gave sure promise of the great man who recreated and made a new nation of Israel.

*Shaping the Future*

We shape ourselves, the joy or fear
Of which the coming life is made,
And fill our future atmosphere
With sunshine or with shade.
The tissue of the life to be
We weave with colors all our own,
And in the field of destiny
We reap as we have sown.

—Author Unknown.

*Class Problems*

1. Where was Shiloh? Ramah?
2. Relate the incidents connected with Samuel's birth.
3. Give a good definition of prayer.
4. What are the advantages of early entrance on the Lord's work?
5. Give in detail the manner of Samuel's call.
6. How does God call men into his service today?
7. What is meant by "sowing wild oats?"
8. What elements in Samuel's life contributed to his greatness?
9. How does this new period of Israel differ from the period of the Judges?
10. What is the message of this lesson to us?

## Lesson 36

# ELI, THE HIGH PRIEST

Lesson Text: 1 Sam. 2:12-36; 4:1-17.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Sam. 2:27-28; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 1 Sam. 2:29-30.

Concert Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, grant that we may fully sense the message of our lesson today. May we realize as never before that each of us in a measure is responsible for the conduct of the members of his own household. Help us always to remember that Eli fell from his exalted position as God's high priest because he failed to reprove his sons for their wickedness. Wilt thou enable us to prepare ourselves for the great responsibility of parenthood. On that all important day in our lives when there is placed into our keeping an immortal soul to rear and educate, may we be worthy of the sacred trust, and qualified to discharge it, we humbly pray, Amen.

*Memory Text: Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.—Proverbs 22:6.*

Explain: 2:12 Knew. 18 Linen ephod. 25 Would slay them. 27 A man of God. Did I plainly appear? In Pharaoh's house? 29 Kick ye at. Sacrifice * * * offering. Honourest thy sons above me? 31 Cut off thine arm. 33 Shall die in the flower. 35 A sure house. 4:3 The ark. 6 Hebrews.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Responsibility of Parents*

We have already mentioned the name of Eli, the high priest, in connection with Hannah and her child Samuel. He was a descendant of Aaron through his youngest son, and just how he came to hold the office that belonged by right of descent to the family of Eleazer, the oldest son of Aaron, is not known. Perhaps the latter had no descendant at that time, who was qualified for the office. In his earlier years Eli must have been a man of vigor and capable of being at the head of affairs. He was a man of high religious ideals, and no doubt great things had been expected of him. It is all the more lamentable to record that he was a dismal failure.

This came about through the gross wickedness of his two sons. There are many dark pictures in Israel during

the period we have been treating—pictures of idolatry, bloodshed, treachery, and almost every kind of sin—but there is none more awful than the picture of Eli's family at Shiloh. In other cases, individual members of the nation had committed grievous sins, but in this case, it was the very elect who transgressed the laws of God; it was those who should have led the people in the paths of righteousness who became the ringleaders in dishonoring his name. They stole for their own use the best of sacrifices which worshipers brought as offerings to God, and they were guilty of the grossest immorality at the very sanctuary that should have been the holiest place in all the land. This of necessity had a most demoralizing effect on the faith of the people. How could men have veneration for God when his priests were guilty of such glaring sins as greed and lechery in the very place where men and women came with a prayer on their lips to worship? Belief in God vanished. When such men are at the head of religion, the whole moral life of the community is lowered, and sin spreads like a pestilence among the people.

And what did Eli do to correct this state of things? Practically nothing. He spoke against it, he feebly remonstrated with his sons, but failed to act. He showed that he knew how displeasing their conduct was to God, but permitted them to go on officiating as priests. Had he acted as he should have done in the beginning, he might have corrected the evil; but he put it off too long. He let the interests of his family outweigh his duty to God, until he was helpless in his own house. And since he would not or could not do his duty in stamping out the atrocious proceedings of his vile sons, God himself proceeded to do it. The national worship must be kept uncontaminated at all costs.

First, a prophet was sent to Eli to warn him of the judgments that threatened the destruction of his house. Perhaps God wanted to give him one more chance to act before

it was too late. This was the message he brought: First, he reminded him of the great kindness which God had shown his house in being entrusted with the priesthood. Next, he asked why he trampled on God's sacrifice and offering, and considered the interests of his sons above the honor of God. Third, he revoked the promise he had made of the perpetuity of his family, and pronounced upon it a terrible degradation. He and his family would lose God's favor and support, and none of them would reach old age. His wicked sons would die the same day and another priest selected who would follow the counsel of God. Even Shiloh itself was to fall into ruin and decay.

We would naturally think that after such a warning Eli would have acted against his sons. He might not have been able to change their conduct, but he could at least have removed them from the holy office, which they were disgracing. But still he did nothing to correct the evils which were ruining, not only his own family, but all Israel as well. He may still have threatened them, but failed to execute the threat. We wonder how under such impending judgments he could continue indifferent. And we wonder, still more, how his sons could act as they did. What a career they chose for themselves! With the counsel and example of their father, what men they might have been! Could anything be more deplorable? Their conduct in such an environment was absolutely inexcusable.

And now we must take notice of the Philistines once more. Since Samson's great exploit at Gaza, when he pulled down the temple of Dagon on himself and the assembled thousands of his enemies, we have heard nothing of them. But now they seem to have recovered from that terrible catastrophe and invade the land of Israel once more. In great fear the army organizes to defend their hearths and homes. But no great Barak or Gideon came forward to lead them to victory. Eli was too old, and his sons had little standing with the people. In their desperation some-

one suggested that the Ark be brought from the temple at Shiloh and carried with them into battle. This met with instant approval. They perhaps remembered how the priests had carried the Ark at the head of the army as it marched around the walls of Jericho, and how the walls had fallen. Whether Eli gave his consent to this arrangement we do not know. But at any rate, he did not prevent it.

A word here in regard to the Ark of the Covenant might be in order. It was an oblong box something like the chests used for clothing today, made of very durable wood $3\frac{3}{4}$x$2\frac{1}{4}$x$2\frac{1}{4}$ feet in dimensions, overlaid with gold, with a rim or moulding around the top. There were gold rings at each corner for the staves that were used to carry it. Covering the lid was a solid gold plate, called the Mercy seat, with two cherubims, one at each end. These were symbols of the presence of Jehovah, so that wherever the Ark rested there was a manifestation of the presence of the God of Israel. The interior of the Ark contained the tables of stone, on which were written the ten commandments, Aaron's rod and a pot of manna.

The Ark was made while the children of Israel were in the wilderness under the direction of Moses, and was considered very sacred. It was kept in the holy of holies room in the Tabernacle, where only the high priest was permitted to enter. Later, as we have stated, it was placed in a room of the house of God at Shiloh. When the camp of Israel was on the march, the Ark was carried from place to place by the priests. This gave the people the first idea of a God who could go with them wherever they went. Up to this time they had believed that God exercised no control except in certain localities. It took a long time for them to get a conception of one God ruling all nations. That is why when they first came to Canaan, they were so prone to worship the gods of that land, as well as Jehovah.

When the Ark was taken to the army, the Philistines were at first terror stricken, but they rallied and won a great

victory over the Israelites, even capturing the sacred Ark. That was because of the presence in the army of the two sons of Eli. Just as the sin of Achan had brought defeat at Ai, so now the sins of these men caused the Lord to withdraw his assistance, and Israel was as helpless as Samson without his locks of hair. Having the Ark with them under such conditions was a desecration and a hindrance instead of a help. Thousands of the army of Israel were slain, including the two wicked priests who had caused all the trouble.

When Eli heard the terrible news that Israel had lost the battle, his two sons slain, and the Ark taken, he fell over backward from his chair, and his neck was broken. It was a sad end to a man who might have achieved great distinction, had he been faithful to his trust as God's high priest. Now his family was extinct, and none were left to do him honor. Not only that, but Shiloh was razed to the ground by the Philistines, the altar was torn down, and this sacred city passes from the pages of history.

---

*Breaking Bad Habits*

"How shall I a habit break?"
As you did that habit make;
As you gathered you must loose;
As you yielded, now refuse.
Thread by thread the strands we twist
Till they bind us neck and wrist;
Thread by thread the patient hand
Must untwine ere free we stand;
As we builded stone by stone,
We must toil, unhelped, alone,
Till the wall is overthrown.

—J. B. O'Reilley.

*Class Problems*

1. Who was Eli and what was his character?
2. How do you account for the wickedness of his sons?
3. Of what two great sins were they guilty?
4. What message did the man of God bring to Eli?
5. Tell all you can about the Ark of the Covenant.
6. How did the construction of the Ark change the people's idea of God?
7. Having the Ark at the head of the army at Jericho meant victory, while at Shiloh it resulted in defeat. Why?
8. What happened to Eli and his sons? To Shiloh?
9. What has impressed you most in this lesson? Why?

LESSON 37

## SAMUEL, THE KING MAKER

Lesson Text: 1 Samuel 8:1-9; 10:1; 12:1-5.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Sam. 8:5-7; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 1 Sam. 12:4-5.

Concert Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. On this new day in our lives we come to thee in gratitude and prayer. We hunger and thirst after righteousness. Wilt thou feed us this day with the bread of life, and give us to drink from living fountains. May our contact with thy servant Samuel inspire us to seek thee early in life. Help us to catch his spirit of ready obedience and willingness to surrender his own rights and interests for the common good. He sought nothing for himself, but only to serve and help thy people Israel. So may we be willing to dedicate our lives for the welfare of others. In Christ's name. Amen.

*Memory Text: My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord: in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.—Psalms* 5:3.

Explain: 8:1 Made his sons judges. 5 Like all the nations. 6 Displeased Samuel. 8 Which they have done. 9:5 Take thought. 6 In this city. 9 Seer. Prophet. 14 Came out against them. 20 On whom is all the desire. 21 The least of all. 26 Called Saul to the top. 12:3 His anointed.

### THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

#### *Surrendering Authority*

And now we return to Samuel. His ready obedience as a boy should be noted. It will be remembered that he was placed as a servant under Eli in the temple. We read that he opened the doors, lit the lamps and attended to other things connected with the temple services. On the night when God called him he was sound asleep; but he readily responded, thinking that it was Eli's voice. Three times he got up without a complaint and stumbled over the hard stones in the cold and darkness to see what was wanted, only to be told that no one had called. This must have been highly provoking, but Samuel's temper seems not to have been ruffled in the least. He felt that he was a servant, and it was his part to obey his master, no matter how unreasonable he might appear to be.

Not only was Samuel obedient, but the next morning he showed that he was courageous, and at the same time kind. He had a sympathetic regard for the feelings of Eli, and did not rush up and blurt out his sad message. Some people can tell the truth in such a way as to show the very spirit of the devil. Samuel was considerate; but when Eli asked to know the truth, his young servant held nothing back, though he knew what suffering it would cause. His sense of duty did not dull his sense of sympathy for the great man who was passing into eclipse.

After the tragic death of Eli and his sons, Samuel became the dominating figure in Israel. The people looked to him for help in halting the advance of the victorious Philistines, and he did not disappoint them. But it took time. Israel had been guilty of gross sins, and there must be sincere repentance before God would help them to drive out the invaders. Years went by, and gradually under the inspiring direction of Samuel, the people purified themselves and put away their strange gods. Samuel called representatives from all parts of central Palestine to meet at Mizpeh, and there they fasted and confessed their sins; and Samuel interceded with the Lord that he would forgive them, and he judged them there.

When the Philistines heard of this great gathering, they sent another invading army against them, and when the children of Israel heard this, they were afraid, and asked Samuel to pray for their success. He had already done so, and now he offered up a burnt offering, and again cried to the Lord for victory against the enemy. His prayers were answered. It was a new Israel that went into that battle. They were confident and unafraid. A great thunder storm had gathered a little to the east and, now accompanied with a heavy wind, broke in the faces of the enemy, who were advancing against the heights at Mizpeh. It was the story of the battle of Tabor over again. Unable to face this terrific war of the elements, the Philistines turned their backs to

the wind, and Israel rushed upon them from behind and drove them like smoke before the wind. The rout was complete. The remnant of their ranks that survived the slaughter, broken and disheartened, returned to their own country, and came no more into the coast of Israel during all the days of Samuel.

Samuel grew old in the service of God and the people, and then as Eli had done before him, he called his sons to assist him as judges in Israel. And, sad to relate, they also failed to measure up. While they were not guilty of the gross crimes that were told of Eli's sons, still it is said that they accepted bribes and disgraced the honored name they bore. This gave the people a cause of complaint. For a long time there had been a growing sentiment among them for a king. If they were to succeed against all the enemies that were constantly encroaching against their borders, they must cease to be tribes and become one nation with a centralized government. So they came to Samuel at Ramah and said: "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."

What a shock this must have been to the great man who had given his whole life unstintingly to their welfare. There must have been much talk about it among the people before the request was made. But it seems that Samuel had not heard of it. Conscious of his own integrity and disinterested service, he never dreamed of any under-current against him. What a sad awakening! It is not pleasant for a ruler to be told that he is getting old and should provide a successor. It must have been hard also for him to hear the bitter truth that his sons were disreputable. How keenly he must have remembered that day long ago when he had told Eli the same bitter truth! But this delegation had not been as considerate of his feelings as he had been of Eli's. Though he was sorely displeased, he did the wise thing; he went to the Lord about it.

Much to his surprise, no doubt, the Lord approved of the people's request, and comforted Samuel by assuring him that they were not rejecting their present leader, but the Lord himself. When convinced that it was the Lord's will that the form of government should be changed, he acquiesced without a murmur. And this makes him one of the most unselfish and heroic figures in the history of the world. To forsake the past and abandon every policy for which he had worked through all the years of his life and voluntarily give into other hands the power which he held, required a sacrifice on his part that few could have made. They were virtually asking him to pass condemnation on his own efforts, to give up the ideals of his country's greatness, both religious and material. For if Israel became like other nations, it would no longer be the Israel that he had served and loved. This delegation was saying to him, "Your policy has been a failure; instead of God as our ruler, we want a king."

But since it was God's will also, Samuel entered into the new movement heartily. Not only did he work outwardly for the new kingdom, but he added his prayers for its success also. He really wanted it to succeed. And when Saul was chosen as the ruler, the new king had no more ardent champion than the man who had given him the place. The first meeting of the two is interesting. Saul is hunting his father's animals, and he goes to consult Samuel as a magician, who may be able to tell him where they can be found. After royally entertaining the obscure young man, and walking with him outside the city, the meeting ends by Samuel taking a vial of oil and pouring it on his head, with the statement that God has chosen him to be captain over his inheritance. Whatever regret Samuel had that he was surrendering his power to another, he carefully hid. And Saul left him without knowing that he took the very life of Samuel with him.

And when the new ruler is crowned, Samuel stands

before the people for the last time. He knows that from now on Saul must "increase" while he must "decrease"; that from that day, the affections of the people that had so long been his will be given to the king. Then he reminds them that while he has acted on their advice and given them a king as they had requested, still he wants them to know that he has nothing to be ashamed of in his conduct or in his administration as their leader and judge; and he throws out this challenge:

"Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you."

And they all responded that he was guiltless of any wrong against the people. What a wonderful tribute after a lifetime of service! What an example Samuel set for public officials to follow! His mother had lent him to the Lord all the days of his life, and how wonderfully he magnified the name of the Lord! He exemplified in his person the ideals of loyalty and honesty that the Lord desires all men to adopt. And when his work was done, he graciously stepped aside that another might take his place. But neither the new king, nor any of his successors, left a record as clean and unstained as Samuel left that day when he surrendered the government of Israel to Saul.

---

*Give Us Men*

Give us men—men from every rank,
Fresh and free and frank;
Men of thought and reading;
Men of light and leading;
Men of loyal breeding,
The Nation's welfare speeding!
Men of faith and not of fiction;

Men of lofty aim and action;
Men who tread where saints have trod,
Men for country, home and God;
Give us men! I say again, give us such men.
—Author Unknown.

*Class Problems*

1. What was the condition of the country after the death of Eli?
2. What part did Samuel play from that time on until the kingdom was established?
3. Tell about the battle of Mizpeh. How do you account for the victory of Israel?
4. How far was Mizpeh from Shiloh? In what direction?
5. What were the advantages of a kingdom? The disadvantages?
6. Why was the request for a king a hard trial for Samuel?
7. In what way did Samuel show his greatness?
8. Give an account of the anointing of Saul.
9. Where is this quotation found: "He must increase, but I must decrease"? Who said it? How does it apply to Samuel?
10. What challenge did Samuel throw out to the people when he turned over the government to Saul? Discuss it.

LESSON 38 Daniel

# SAUL, THE FIRST KING

Lesson Text: 1 Samuel 10:9-27; 11.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Sam. 11:12-14; Prayer by Student; Concert reading: 1 Sam. 11:15.

Concert Prayer: Eternal Father, giver of every good and perfect gift, we pray that some great seer may entertain us as honored guests, and plant in our lives a great objective such as Samuel gave to Saul. May we like him receive "another heart," a new conception of ourselves and the possibilities of usefulness that lie hidden in our lives. We desire to realize the highest destiny of which we are capable, not for fame nor to rule over earthly kingdoms, but to honor thy great name among our fellows. We would be the least among thy children, that we may become the greatest. For Christ's sake. Amen.

*Memory Text: Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you.*—1 *Sam.* 12:24.

Explain: 10:9 Another heart. 11 Is Saul also among the prophets? 12 Who is their father? 19 Thousands. 25 The manner of the kingdom. 26 A band of men. 27 Children of Belial. 11:1 Nahash. 3 Come out. 7 Fear of the Lord. 15 They made Saul king.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Undiscovered Kings*

One night's contact with Samuel changed Saul from an ordinary individual, modest and unassuming, who had apparently never thought of anything higher than his daily routine of farm work, to a man of ambition, purpose and will. "Another heart" was given him. He was a new man, transformed into a leader of other men, a military genius, "every inch a king." He came into the city of Ramah one night a simple laboring man; he left it the next morning ready to wear a crown.

How many born kings there are among us who are never found! No Samuel comes out to meet them; no seer ever sees them to tell them that they are head and shoulders higher than other people. One of the great tragedies in life is the unseen talents that are never discovered, the seeds of greatness that lie buried deep and never germinate in count-

less thousands of human lives. We need more prophets to tell us what we *can do and become,* and not so many pessimists to tell us what we *cannot do and what we cannot become.*

But Saul with this new life stirring within his breast was still modest and wise. He did not proclaim from the housetops that he was to be the king of Israel. There was time enough for that later. He went unobserved back to the quiet and simple life that he had pursued so long. Soon Samuel called an assembly at Mizpeh; not the Mizpeh where Jephthah lived in Gilead, but the place where Israel defeated the Philistines, a few miles northwest of Jerusalem. Here lots were cast to determine the tribe and family from which the new king should come. No doubt Samuel had already made known to the leaders that Saul was the man whom God had chosen, and he was named. When they looked for him, he could not be found. But the Lord revealed his hiding place, and he was speedily brought into the presence of the people. His fine physical appearance pleased the assembly, and the shout of "Long live the king!" was heard for the first time in Israel.

But it seems that a certain number, called in the text the "children of Belial," were not satisfied with the choice, for they said: "How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace." Perhaps there were more of these than the text seems to indicate, for Saul did not immediately assume authority. He went quietly back to his farm again as though nothing had happened. From this it appears that he did not care to arouse any opposition at the beginning of his reign. He was willing to wait until a crisis arose to demonstrate his qualifications for the position to which he had been called.

It came sooner than anyone expected. One evening after a long day's work, as Saul climbed with his oxen the steep hill to the city of Gibeath where he lived, a loud wail

from the people greeted his ears. On inquiring the cause, he learned that a messenger had just arrived from Jabesh-Gilead across the Jordan with the terrible news that Nahash the king of the Ammonites had fallen upon the men of Jabesh. They had offered to make a covenant of peace with him, but he would only consent to peace if they permitted him to "thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel." They had asked for seven days respite to "send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel," and if no one came to save them, they would agree to these harsh terms. Strange to say, the cruel king had granted this request. He must have been very confident of his own power, or else had a perfect contempt for all the tribes of Israel.

Saul's patriotism was aroused and it did not take him long to decide what to do. He hewed two of his oxen to pieces and sent the bloody fragments throughout all Israel, with the bold announcement that any man failing to follow him would have his own oxen dealt with in the same manner. It was a courageous declaration for an untried man to make. But the very audacity of it arrested attention. The people were afraid to refuse, and they rallied as one man to his standard. Saul also sent messengers to Jabesh-Gilead to announce the approach of his army to relieve the city. Then he hastened down the ravines of the Jordan and having crossed the river divided his force into three companies, each of which was to approach the city by different roads. The plan was carried out successfully. The attack on the Ammonites was made early in the morning and continued until noon. Israel seems to have found them entirely unprepared, and they fell into a panic, so that their defeat was complete. The slaughter must have been terrible; for we read, "it came to pass, that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together."

The news of this great victory thrilled all the tribes of Israel. It placed Saul on the very pinnacle of popularity.

He was a national hero. Every heart beat quicker when his name was mentioned, and those who opposed his selection as king were in disgrace. Many clamored for their death, but the king would not hear of this. He said, "There shall not a man be put to death this day: for today the Lord had wrought salvation in Israel." Saul's throne was now secure. The people east of the Jordan were especially grateful, and never forgot their debt to Saul.

Among those who were most pleased was the prophet Samuel. His choice of a king had been vindicated, and he was proud of the man he had anointed. There was no jealousy in his heart, only joy. "Come," he said, "let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there." This was a wise suggestion, for Gilgal was a sacred place in the history of Israel. It was the first place that the people had encamped under Joshua after crossing the Jordan. It was here that the twelve stones taken from the dry bed of the Jordan had been set up, as a testimony to God of their miraculous deliverance. It was here also that they had celebrated the first Feast of the Passover in the promised land. There was no place so fitting to usher in a new epoch in the history of God's chosen people.

It was an impressive scene in that sacred place when the people hailed Saul as their king, and solemnly ratified the action taken by the assembly at Mizpeh. There was Samuel, the last and best of the judges, old and gray-haired, formally surrendering his authority to the young and vigorous man beside him, and challenging the people to point out any wrong that he had committed during his long administration as their judge and leader. How could they ever forget that last fervent plea with them and with their king to serve the Lord with all their hearts, and not rebel against his commandments?

What a happy day that must have been for Saul! The least among his brethren, according to his own statement, exalted to the throne, and the idol of every tribe in the na-

tion! Supported and loved, not only by the people but by the prophet Samuel and by God himself! Did ever a king begin his reign under such favorable auspices? What a destiny lay before Saul that day at Gilgal! Both earth and heaven united to make his reign one of the most glorious in the annals of Israel.

O Saul, Saul, it was well for you in that joyful hour, that you could not see the years ahead. From that high pinnacle with Samuel and God by your side, down to the witch of Endor was a long descent, and we wonder how it came about. How could the generous Saul who so freely forgave the men who at first opposed him, because the Lord had given him the victory at Jabesh, a few years later in jealous rage hurl a javelin at his brave son Jonathan and hunt the loyal and faithful David like a partridge on the mountains? Such a glorious beginning, and such a tragic ending!

---

*Greatness*

The great were once as you.
They whom men magnify today
Once groped and blundered on life's way,
Were fearful of themselves, and thought
By magic was men's greatness wrought.
They feared to try what they could do;
Yet Fame hath crowned with her success
The selfsame gifts that you possess.

—Edgar A. Guest.

*Class Problems*

1. What may contact with great men do for us?
2. Do you think that Saul would ever have become a leader if he had not met Samuel? Why?
3. Explain the statement: "How many born kings there are among us who are never found!"
4. How can we know what talents we have?

5. Why was it wise for Saul to wait before assuming authority?
6. What may we conclude in regard to the character of the men of Jabesh-Gilead from their statement to Nahash: "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee."
7. Name two other men who left their plow to assume leadership in the army.
8. What significance did the fragments of Saul's oxen have when sent to the men of Israel?
9. What characteristics of leadership does Saul display in this crisis?
10. Why was Saul chosen king both at Mizpeh and Gilgal? Discuss.

LESSON 39

# SAUL, THE REJECTED

Lesson Text: 1 Samuel 13:1-14; 15:1-31.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Sam. 15:14-19; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading 15:22.

Concert Prayer: Heavenly Father, we read of Saul's disobedience and rejection with sorrow. Help us to look within ourselves and see whether we can be depended upon faithfully to keep the commandments which thou hast given to us. We, too, are weak and need thy constant fellowship. May we prove worthy of thy confidence, and never leave thee or fail in the requirements that may be made of us as we go forth to battle with sin. Help us to destroy it root and branch and return not only victorious, but with thy approval of our conquest. Amen.

*Memory Text: Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.*—1 *Sam.* 15:22.

Explain: 13:2 Michmash. 4 Garrison. 5 In Michmash. 6 People did hide themselves. 14 After his own heart. 15:3 Utterly destroy. 5 City of Amalek. 6 The Kenites. 7 Havilah. Shur. 11 It grieved Samuel. 12 Carmel. A place. 23 Iniquity.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Obedience vs. Sacrifice*

In order to understand the problem of Saul's disobedience and rejection, we must judge both Samuel and Saul by the times and the environment in which they lived. The theory of the monarchy in Israel was that the king was God's representative. But God's will was made known to him by the prophet, who reported to him what God required. It was very important therefore that the king literally obeyed the prophet, when he spoke in the name of the Lord.

For two years Saul's reign prospered; then came a test. A brilliant exploit by Saul's son, Jonathan, who smote a garrison of the Philistines at Geba, brought on a crisis between the two nations. To avenge the insult, the Philistines invaded the country in countless numbers. Saul called the army to assemble at Gilgal, but they responded in great fear. Some escaped service by crossing the Jordan into Gilead. The Philistine hosts kept coming in ever-increasing numbers, while Saul's men kept melting away in sheer fear of the

enemy. Apparently, the only hope Saul had was to strike at once, and this he was prevented from doing by an order from Samuel that he wait seven days until he came, in order that steps might be taken to secure divine guidance and help from God. A more severe test to a man of military instincts could hardly have been devised.

But Saul trusted too much in his own strength. He should have remembered Barak and Deborah at Taber, and Gideon and his three hundred at Gilboa. What was there to fear so long as God was with his army, no matter how small it might be? And, on the other hand, how could he hope to defeat the Philistines without God's help? The trouble with Saul was that he lacked faith. When Samuel did not come, he decided to go ahead in his own way. "And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt-offering to me, and peace-offerings. And he offered the burnt-offering." This was deliberate disobedience. How different would have been his conduct, if he really wanted to honor God! In faith he would gladly have waited for God's prophet.

When Samuel finally came, Saul was ready with excuses: "Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the Lord: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt-offering."

All very plausible, but beside the point. He failed to trust in God. He deserted principle to serve expediency. The same thing happens today. Men do this or that or the other wrong, and make excuses for it. They have to lie to get a job, or break the Sabbath because some one else did, or take something that did not belong to them, because the owner had no use for it. These excuses amount to this: It is better to offend God and gain some slight benefit, than it would be to please God and lose the benefit.

But those who take this course must meet "Samuel" and listen to his condemnation just as Saul did: "Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue." What a terrible price to pay for disobedience! Saul is not alone. The same condemnation awaits all who follow his example. A kingdom lost! Yes, worse than that; they part company with God.

The second test was a different one. Saul was sent by Samuel to exterminate the Amalekites. The order was to slay men, women, children and all domestic animals. The reason for this was that these people had shown relentless hostility to Israel, from the days of the Exodus until Saul's expedition against them. But we shudder at the cruel order. How could God require such a thing? Again, we must remind ourselves that Samuel and Saul lived more than three thousand years ago, when human life was not considered sacred. Extermination was the custom in those days, and Israel could not have survived if they had not followed the example of the surrounding nations. It was no shock for Saul to receive such an order, and his conscience did not upbraid him for carrying it out. Some have attributed to him a more humane spirit than to Samuel, because he saved the king and some of the cattle. But this is ridiculous. After exterminating everybody else, he is not entitled to much credit for saving the king on humane grounds. This was only done to grace his triumph, and the cattle were taken as booty.

One thing should be remembered in this connection. The prey was to be destroyed as well as the people. The soldiers must not enrich themselves with the spoils. That is what Saul failed to remember. It was the same order that had been given by Joshua at Jericho. Saul must have forgotten the fate of Achan, when he dared to take "the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and

of the lambs, and all that was good." It was an act of pure greed. This changes the whole aspect of the case. Instead of its being a solemn retribution on a sinful nation, it became an unprincipled foray, in which the victorious party slew the other to get their goods. A sacred war had been turned into a predatory campaign.

When Samuel learned of Saul's disobedience he was much grieved, and he cried to the Lord a whole night. All his high hopes of the king were ended. It was a terrible struggle to give him up, but God could not use a man who was disloyal to him. He must have one who was wholly dedicated to God. Saul was not wilfully wicked, but he was trying to serve two masters, and renouncing the conditions upon which he had accepted the kingdom. So Samuel was sent to tell him that another king had been chosen in his stead.

When Saul met the prophet he was ready again with excuses. He claimed to have performed the commandment of the Lord. When Samuel called attention to the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen, Saul had a plausible explanation. These were brought by the people as a sacrifice to the Lord. He wanted to show the prophet how loyal he was to God. But he only added hypocrisy and falsehood to his sin of disobedience. It was not the people, but himself that was responsible. Samuel gave Saul to understand that sacrifice without obedience was unacceptable. Moral conduct is more important in the eyes of God than ceremonial form.

Then came the terrible verdict: "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king." Saul is overwhelmed by the terrible announcement, and confesses that he has sinned, but he does not ask forgiveness; he is more interested in having Samuel honor him before the people than in receiving God's pardon. Like Cain he does not hate his sin, but only dreads the result of it. This is not repentance. Had Saul at that moment fallen

on his knees and asked forgiveness, he might have received it. But all he seemed to be concerned about was to stand well with the people; and he was willing to confess his sin, if by so doing it could be made to appear that Samuel was still his friend.

From this time on Samuel came no more to see him. The voice that he had refused to hear was silent, the light that he had refused to follow was withdrawn, and so he had to stumble along in the silent darkness. Saul thought that he could be a law to himself, but found to his sorrow that when God withdrew his counsel, he was helpless. We never miss the blessings that we have, until they are taken from us. Samuel and Saul together were invincible, but Saul alone could do nothing. From this day on Saul walks step by step a downward path. He longs for the old companionship, but it never returns. In desperation he tries to thwart God's purpose by attempting to murder his rival; but it is useless. Our hearts beat in sympathy for him in his vain efforts to regain what he has lost, for with all his faults there was something great about him, and his personality grips and holds our interest in spite of his failure.

---

*Life*

Life is a leaf of paper white
Whereon each one of us may write
His word or two and then comes night.
Muse not which way the pen to hold;
Luck hates the slow and loves the bold;
Soon comes the darkness and the cold.
Greatly begin! Though thou hast time
But for a line, be that sublime—
Not failure, but low aim is crime.

—J. R. Lowell.

*Class Problems*

1. What elements in Saul's character helped to bring about his failure?
2. Justify the punishment he received for not waiting for Samuel, when he had been commanded to do so.
3. Why do you think he failed to meet this test?
4. What justification was there for the extermination of the Amalekites?
5. Why was Saul's disobedience in this case so serious?
6. Compare Saul's sin, and Achan's sin.
7. Name some good traits in Saul. Some bad traits.
8. Why did Samuel mourn for him so long?
9. What is the message to you in this lesson?
10. What application can we make of the memory text?

## Lesson 40

# DAVID, THE YOUNG CHAMPION

Lesson Text: 1 Samuel 17.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Sam. 17:32-37; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 1 Sam. 17:45-46.

Concert Prayer: Our God, we call on thee for help. The Philistines are in front of us; the armies of sin beset our path. Their champion seeks to engage us in battle. He defies thee and all those who are seeking to magnify thy name. Oh, Father, give us courage to accept his challenge, as David did the challenge of Goliath. We are not clad in the armor worn by giants; we have not learned to use the weapons of our foe; but our trust is in thee. In thy strength is our hope of victory. Wilt thou not fail us as we go forth to vindicate thy holy name among the children of men. For Christ's sake. Amen.

*Memory Text: And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.*—1 *Sam.* 17:32.

Explain: 4 Six cubits and a span. 5 Brass. Five thousand shekels. 6 Target. 12 An old man. 17 Parched. 18 Take their pledge. 20 Trench. 22 His carriage. 25 Free. 28 The wilderness. 37 The Lord be with thee. 38 Armed David with his armour. 39 Proved. 43 Staves. 52 The valley. 54 Brought it to Jerusalem.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Strength of the Weak*

Reference has already been made to two passes leading from the Maritime plain to the Central highland; namely, the vale of Ajalon and the vale of Sorek. Today we are interested in a third pass just south of Sorek, called the vale of Elah, located about eight miles west of Bethlehem. This was the stage of the encounter between David and Goliath. Some years prior to this historic incident, David had been anointed in the presence of his father and brethren, by the prophet Samuel, to be Saul's successor as king of Israel. Evidently the other members of the family had paid little attention to it, for it looked so out of all human probability. It is quite certain, however, that David remembered it. We may safely conjecture that during the intervening years, while tending his father's sheep, he had often thought of it.

and resolved that the prophecy should come true. It is even likely that he had visited Samuel from time to time, and had been instructed by him.

During all these years, there had been constant warfare between Israel and the Philistines. Once Saul had won a great victory, as the result of a single-handed exploit that Jonathan had executed against them at Michmash, just north of Jerusalem. This had created a panic among them, and Israel had pursued them with great slaughter to their own borders.

Now they have recovered from their defeat and are invading the territory of Israel once more farther to the south. Saul hastened to meet them, and the two armies came together at the vale of Elah. By this time, however, the Philistines had developed a wholesome respect for Saul and his army, and each side hesitated to begin an attack on the other. For more than six weeks no battle ensued, but every day a great giant named Goliath came out from the enemy's ranks and challenged the army of Saul to select a man to meet him in single combat. Whichever side lost should be slaves to the other.

Israel did not have a man who dared to accept the challenge. Even the fearless Jonathan hesitated to encounter such a formidable antagonist, for Goliath was nine and a half feet high. "And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him."

At length the two armies were ready for battle, with every advantage on the side of the Philistines. Goliath had broken the morale of Saul's army. On the morning when the encounter was to take place, Goliath made one more plea for a single-handed combat. Again he defied the armies of Israel, and called for a man to fight with him.

And this time the challenge was accepted. David had been sent by his father from Bethlehem with provisions for his three elder brothers who were in Saul's army, and to

inquire about their welfare. He found the two armies drawn up in battle array, but rushed forward and saluted his brethren; and it was while he was talking with them, that Goliath issued his final challenge. It would have been well for him if he had kept quiet that day. David sees the consternation in the ranks of Israel as he listens to the bold words of the giant, and he wonders at it. Can it be possible that in God's army there is not a man who dares to fight the Philistine? His indignation is aroused, and though it is presumptuous on his part, he dares to say in the hearing of those around him:

"Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" He inquires further into the matter and learns that Saul has promised great riches and honors, and even his daughter, to the man who will kill Goliath. David is humiliated to learn that the God of Israel can be insulted without a protest, and makes it known that he will fight the giant. But when his brother Eliab hears of his proposal he becomes angry and scoffingly inquires: "Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness?"

David keeps control of his temper, as he replies: "What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" There certainly was a cause for someone to speak. Goliath had made his challenge for forty days, and neither Eliab nor anyone else had had the courage to accept it. But David did not hesitate, for when he was called into the presence of Saul and Saul had an opportunity to look him over, he said: "Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth."

That was just like Saul. He could see nothing but earthly standards of judgment. David could not fight Goliath because he was not old enough. The king had none of the faith that removes mountains; and his army partook of the same spirit. No wonder they failed so often. David

told Saul about a lion and a bear that he had slain, and promised him that Goliath would meet the same fate. Whether he convinced Saul or not, it must at least have been refreshing to hear someone speak with such confidence; and he said: "Go, and the Lord be with thee." He probably did not think much about the Lord; what he meant was: "Go, and good luck to you."

Then Saul armed David with his own armor. He put a helmet on his head and gave him a sword in his hand. David walked back and forth in the king's tent; but he was not satisfied, and said to Saul: "I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them." The king should have known this. What could David do with such an equipment? He was not fighting the giant in Saul's way. Our failures in life are often the result of trying to use weapons that we have not "proved." David's contest with Goliath teaches us the great lesson that we cannot win victories by using the armor of others.

So he selected five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's bag. He took his sling in his hand and also his shepherd's staff, and went out to meet the Philistine. It must have looked very foolish to those who saw him. David would not have had many backers in the army to wager that he would win. When Goliath saw him, no words were bitter enough for his scorn. He had sought a warrior to fight with, and Saul insults him by sending a mere boy. We cannot blame him so very much, for he knew nothing of faith in God, and that was David's strength. "Am I a dog," he cried, "that thou comest to me with staves? * * * Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field." David did not boast in his own strength, but told Goliath that he came in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom Goliath had defied. With the utmost confidence he predicted his own victory, that all the assembly might know there was a God in Israel.

Everybody knows the result. Almost before anyone in either army could realize what was happening, the man who for forty days had boasted of his strength and defied the armies of Israel was dead, slain by the man he had laughed at. The result was that the Israelites were saved from their threatened bondage, and David became the popular hero of the hour.

There is a lesson for all of us in this story of David. While everybody else was surprised at his victory, it was no surprise to him. He was as certain of the outcome when he went out to meet his foe, as he was when he left the field. There is something divine in men like that. Goliath, so large and powerful in the eyes of others, looked small to David, for God walked by his side. With such support, he was absolutely invincible, and he knew it. Such faith is wonderful, and the glory of it is that all may have it. It is God's free gift to every one who sincerely desires it, and seeks for it in humility and prayer.

---

May every soul that touches mine,
Be it the slightest contact,
Get therefrom some good, some little grace,
One kindly thought, one inspiration yet unfelt,
One bit of courage for the darkening skies,
One gleam of faith to brave the thickening ills of life,
One glimpse of brighter skies beyond the gathering mists,
To make this world worth while, and heaven a surer heritage.

—Author Unknown.

*Class Problems*

1. Name the three vales that lead from the Maritime plain to the Central highland and some event connected with each.
2. Why did the two armies at Elah wait so long before fighting a battle?

3. Give the details of the anointing of David to succeed Saul. (1 Sam. 16:6-13.)
4. Give an account of Jonathan's exploit. (1 Sam. 14:6-15.)
5. Describe Goliath. What challenge did he make?
6. Why did no one accept his challenge until David came? Give reasons for your answer.
7. How did David happen to hear Goliath?
8. How do you account for his courage in accepting the challenge?
9. What is meant by David's statement to Saul that he had not proved his armor?
10. What is the message of this lesson to us?

LESSON 41

# JONATHAN, THE FRIEND

Lesson Text: 1 Samuel 18:1-4; 19:1-7; 20.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Sam. 18:1-4; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: John 15:15.

Concert Prayer: Loving Father, enrich our lives by the sacred ties of friendship. Help us to find somewhere among thy many children, at least one dearly beloved friend whose soul shall be knit to ours, and who shall be to us what Jonathan was to David. We pray for a friend who will defend us when others slander us, to whom we can go for encouragement when we are despondent, for help in times of danger, for comfort in our day of mourning, for protection when we are assailed, and for love when we are hated. And above all others, wilt thou be our Friend? Amen.

*Memory Text: A man that hath friends must show himself friendly; and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.—Proverbs* 18:24.

Explain: 20:4 Thy soul. 5 The new moon. 6 A yearly sacrifice. 8 A covenant of the Lord. 12 About tomorrow anytime. 14 That I die not. 16 At the hand of David's enemies. 19 Thou shalt go down quickly. The business. 25 Jonathan arose, and Abner sat. 26 He is not clean. 30 Mother's nakedness.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Soul Knit to Soul*

The young man David awoke one morning in Bethlehem without the least thought of anything unusual happening during the day. He would care for his father's sheep as he had done every day for years, and when the sun set, return to spend the evening with his parents, and then retire. It would be one more daily routine in his life. How little we realize what a day may bring forth! Any morning may be ushering in a crisis in our lives, fraught with consequences that may affect our eternal destiny. We may be called to make a great decision, render an important service, or be assailed by an overwhelming temptation that may destroy our future prospects of success and ruin our souls.

That morning David was sent to the army, where he met and slew Goliath, and found a kingdom. But he found

more than that; he found Jonathan. And Jonathan was one of the finest men that ever lived. To have such a man for a friend was worth more than a kingdom. It has been written of him: "Jonathan was a true knight of God, who anticipated some of the noblest traits of Christian chivalry. He lived pure, spoke true, righted wrong, was faithful to the high claims of human love, and followed the Christ, though as yet he knew him not. He is the most chivalrous figure in the Old Testament, the flower and crown of Hebrew history, the knight without reproach. So far as we are informed, there was not a single crooked line or dark spot in his conduct."

Every boy and girl should read all that is written in the Bible concerning this remarkable man. His character is so rare and so delightful that none can come in contact with it, and not be inspired and uplifted. There is not another like him in all the records kept by men since the beginning of the world. His beautiful and disinterested friendship stands by itself as the finest example of one man's love for another, of which we have any knowledge. Well might David exclaim when the news of the terrible tragedy on the summit of Gilboa reached him:

> "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan:
> Very pleasant hast thou been unto me:
> Thy love to me was wonderful,
> Passing the love of women."

It is hard to account for Jonathan, with his exalted patriotism and high religious ideals. He lived in a cruel age, when human life and love were lightly esteemed. We cannot understand how such an environment could have produced such a man. As well might we expect a magnificent rose to come from poor soil, where there was neither sunshine nor sufficient moisture. It must be that somewhere hidden in Israel in those days were ideals and a reverence for God of which we have no record. Perhaps it was that same mother whom Saul so unjustly insulted in his anger,

that planted in the heart of her illustrious son those principles of virtue and patriotism which flowered so beautifully in his life and character, and made him the crowning glory of his age. If so, God give to the world more such mothers.

Some one asked Charles Kingsley to what he attributed his remarkable success in life. And he promptly replied: "I had a friend." There can be no question but that Jonathan profoundly influenced the life and character of David. From that memorable day when David was brought into the presence of Saul after his notable victory over Goliath, "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." And it should be remembered that, judging by the way of the world, it was not to the interest of Jonathan to love David. He had everything to lose by his friendship, and nothing to gain. Jonathan was heir to the throne, which from all indications David would one day fill. Saul saw this and was anxious to get rid of his rival, even if he had to murder him to do it. Jonathan saw it also, but only tried the harder to protect him. When the king denounced David, his son defended him even at the risk of his life. Jonathan, because of his brilliant exploits had become "the darling of the army;" but when David came, the fickle populace turned from their heroic prince, and acclaimed the slayer of Goliath as their favorite. There was every reason why Jonathan should have become jealous, but not a trace of it is seen.

Day by day Saul's hatred grew more intense. The very sight of his rival offended him. David saw this and sensed his danger. He expressed his fears to his friend: "What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?" Jonathan could not believe that his father would go to that extreme. But David was sure of it, and said to his friend: "Truly, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death." This statement impressed Jonathan, and he impulsively exclaimed: "Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee."

Did ever a friendship reach a higher plane than that? Jonathan who had been the most loyal of sons, had stood by his father in every extremity, had fought by his side in a hundred battles, and loved him as only a true son can love his father, here declared in favor of his friend. He knew that by befriending David he would offend his father, yet he warmly declared that he would befriend him. He knew that David would go up, while he went down; and yet there does not seem to be the least element of jealousy in his noble nature.

And the two friends enter into a covenant. Jonathan would sound his father, and if he intended to injure David, he would surely let him know. And in return he asked that David would not only show him kindness while he lived, "But also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house forever: no, not when the Lord hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth." Jonathan seemed to have a premonition that he would never live to enjoy the friendship of David, when he should be seated on the throne of Israel.

The noble prince nearly lost his own life in his endeavor to ascertain Saul's purpose concerning his friend. When he explained David's absence from the feast, Saul accused Jonathan of disloyalty, and declared that David must die. "And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain? what evil hath he done?" Then the king became so angry that he threw a javelin at his own son to kill him. What a tragic exhibition Saul here makes of himself! We can in a measure forgive his jealousy of David, but when he so far forgets himself as to try to kill his generous son, for a simple statement, he forfeits all claims to further sympathy; unless, indeed, he was insane as some declare. No wonder that Jonathan arose in fierce anger from the table, and refused to take further part in the feast.

It was a sad meeting of the two friends when they came

together by appointment on the third day, and Jonathan was to reveal his father's state of mind. David had not expected a favorable report, but he must have been shocked to learn how bad conditions really were. In token of love "they kissed one another, and wept one with another."

> They wept as only strong men weep,
> When weep they must or die.

In parting, Jonathan said to David: "Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed forever."

Jonathan lived and died unrewarded for his countless deeds of love and heroism. But he left a name and fame none the less secure in the hearts of men through all generations. He was the brightest light of his day and time. If his soul had been turned inside out, not a spot or blemish could have been found upon it. The pulse beats faster and the soul thrills with emotion when his name is spoken. God give to each of us a friend like Jonathan.

---

*Think of Me*

> Think of me as a friend, I pray,
> For else my life is little worth;
> So shall your memory light my way,
> Although we meet no more on earth.
> For while I know your faith secure,
> I ask no happier fate to see:
> Thus to be loved by one so pure
> Is honor rich enough for me.
>
> —W. Winter.

*Class Problems*

1. Why should we carefully prepare for the life of each day?

2. Tell what happened at the first meeting of David and Jonathan. (18:1-4.)
3. Give the main statements of the quotation concerning Jonathan.
4. Why should everyone be well acquainted with the life of Jonathan?
5. How could a man like Jonathan come from such an environment? Compare with Jesus.
6. Why is Jonathan's friendship more beautiful than David's?
7. Discuss fully the reasons for Saul's intense dislike for David. Jonathan's love for him.
8. What covenant did Jonathan and David enter into?
9. What message does this lesson bring to each of us?

LESSON 42

# ABIGAIL, THE TACTFUL WIFE

Lesson Text: 1 Samuel 25.

Song; Student Reading: 25:28-31; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Matt. 5:44-45.

Concert Prayer: Our merciful Father, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. We confess before thee our weaknesses, our imperfections, our many faults and failings. Wilt thou be merciful unto us, and pardon all our transgressions? And as we are forgiven, so help us to forgive those who may have injured us. Help us to understand that there is no place in thy kingdom for anyone who holds aught against his brother. May we never forget that thy kingdom is a kingdom of peace and love and good will. Make us worthy to inherit it, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.—Luke 2:13-14.*

Explain: 1 Paran. 2 Possessions. Carmel. Great. Shearing sheep. 3 House of Caleb. 8 A good day. 11 My water. 16 A wall. 25 Folly. 28 Battles of the Lord. 29 A man. Bound. In the bundle of life. 31 Causeless. 33 Thy advice. 39 Communed with Abigail.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *A Desert Romance*

Separating the plain of Philistia from the high tableland of Judea on the east is that outlaw section of Palestine called the Shephelah. It extends the entire length of the Judean plateau from the vale of Ajalon on the north to Beer-sheba on the south, a distance of forty-five miles. It is made up of a long line of comparatively low hills, interspersed with numerous narrow valleys and cross ridges. This section is quite distinct from either the plain or the plateau, and in structure seems to belong to neither. A few cross valleys with perennial streams, leading from the Judean plateau, break through the hills here and there and find their way to the sea. The valleys vary in shape, some long, some broad; they support a few great trees, but are mostly covered with brush and scrub oak. Altogether the Shephelah is a rough and tumble sort of land with a wild attractiveness.

It was to this section that David fled for safety when

Saul sought his life. Of necessity he became an outlaw, for Saul relentlessly pursued him from one place to another. He gathered a band of devoted men about him as Jephthah had done in Gilead, and took care of himself as best he could. For a time he joined himself to the Philistines, and came near being compelled to fight against his own people. Twice he had Saul in his power and could have slain him; but refused to do so, giving as his reason that Saul was the Lord's "anointed." It was a hard life, and David had many thrilling adventures and narrow escapes from death. Sometimes he did things for which he has been criticised, but on the whole he conducted himself in a manner that won the approval of his countrymen, and he continually increased in favor with the people.

Then there came a day when the prophet Samuel died and all Israel mourned, and the people went up to do him honor in his home town of Ramah. A truce must have been called, for David also attended the funeral of his master and friend. He got away as soon as possible, however, for he dared not trust himself so near to Saul longer than was necessary. On his return south he and his men, numbering about six hundred, pitched their tents near to Carmel, a town about seven miles south of Hebron.

David was short of supplies and sent a friendly salutation and message of good will to Nabal, a rich flock-master in Carmel, with the request that he render him such assistance as might come readily to his hand to give. David was fully justified in making this request, for on several occasions he and his men had given protection to the wealthy Nabal's property. But Nabal was a man, "churlish and evil in his doings," and he refused point blank: "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants nowadays that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?"

David's men returned with this answer and a report of the treatment they had received. David became fiercely indignant and lost complete command of himself. He vowed that every male member of the house of Nabal should die before morning. Four hundred of his men were ordered to arm themselves and follow him. Nabal was deserving of punishment; but if David had carried out his angry vow of killing all his household, it would have been a death-blow to his honor and his cause. He would have proved himself unworthy of the crown of Israel. Fortunately he was saved. But it was not his fault that his intention was never executed.

Abigail, Nabal's wife, hearing from one of the shepherds of Nabal's treatment of David's messengers, and fearing the consequences, went to the rescue, and by her tact and good judgment saved not only her husband, but David also. Without saying anything to Nabal, she gathered an ample store of provisions and sent them to David. Not satisfied with this, she went herself to make a full explanation and apology for her husband's rudeness.

She met David on the way with his men to execute his vengeance. As soon as she saw him she fell at his feet and made her plea. First, she took the blame on herself and excused the folly of her husband. Next, proceeding on the assumption that her request was already granted, she congratulated David that he had been prevented from shedding blood, and begged that he would accept the supplies which she had sent. Then she went on to imply that he would one day become king of Israel, because he was fighting the battles of the Lord, and no evil had been found in him. She assured him that his soul should "be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God." And finally, in the most tactful way, she assured him that when God had given him his kingdom, he would have no grief in remembering that he had foregone his revenge. In this skilful way she made him see how near he had come to committing a terrible crime.

If we blame David for his rash vow of revenge, we no less admire him for the readiness with which he listened to the reasonable and wholesome counsel of Abigail. He recognized his fault, and confessed it: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hath kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand." Could any confession be more complete and sincere? He thanked God that he had sent her, and blessed her for coming to save him from the offense he had intended to commit. So he accepted the provisions she had sent him, and said to her: "Go up in peace to thine house: see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person."

It was not long before David had convincing proof that it is best to leave vengeance in the hands of God. "And it came to pass about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died." When he learned what his wife had done to appease David, he became so enraged at the loss of his property that he was taken with a fit of apoplexy, a disease to which a debauch of the night before and his dissipated habits in general had predisposed him.

The story of Abigail is one of the most delightful in the Old Testament. She was a woman of rare charm and personal beauty, and, best of all, a woman of understanding. She comes upon us unexpectedly in that desert region of southern Judea. We are surprised to find such a woman in such a place, especially as the wife of a man like Nabal. It must have been that she was forced by her parents to marry him because of his great wealth, for they had nothing in common. Girls in those days had very little to say as to whom they should marry. That was always arranged for them.

But at the same time, she was loyal to her drunken husband and saved his worthless life, and the lives of all the servants of his large establishment. Abigail is one of the

ideal married women of the Bible—the most essentially feminine of them all. Perhaps the most useful gift that a woman can have is tact, and Abigail had that in a superlative degree. She was not called like Deborah to lead her country's army, or die for her father's honor like Jephthah's daughter—few women are called to such heroic deeds—but every woman needs and can imitate the tact and womanly wisdom which Abigail so conspicuously displayed. Abigail could handle people. How skilfully she turned David's anger into admiration. *She handled David,* and he was unaware of it. Not only did she gain her request, but made her enemy feel that it was an honor to grant it. David was made to see how wrong he had been in making his rash vow of vengeance, and willingly confessed it. Very few people can call a person down and have him feel good about it, especially a man so far above her as David was above Abigail. More wonderful still, so skilfully was her plea presented, that she won his love and became his wife. By her tact, she brought a romance out of an impending tragedy.

---

The fairest action of our human life
Is scorning to revenge an injury;
For who forgives without a further strife,
His adversary's heart to him doth tie;
And it is a firmer conquest truly said,
To win the heart, than overthrow the head.

—Elizabeth Carew.

*Class Problems*

1. Locate and describe the Shephelah.
2. Why did David become an outlaw?
3. Relate his experience with Saul as told in 1 Samuel 24.
4. Give an account of the death of Samuel.
5. Where did David go after the funeral?

6. What request did David make of Nabal, and what was his answer?
7. What vow did David make?
8. Who was Abigail, and how did she save her husband?
9. How did she show tact in dealing with David?
10. What is the message of this lesson?

LESSON 43

# DAVID, THE KING

Lesson Text: 1 Chron. 11:4-9; 2 Sam. 5:6-10; 6:1-23; 23:14-17.

Song; Student Reading: 2 Sam. 23:14-16; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 2 Sam. 23:17.

Concert Prayer: Our Father, thy Son taught us to pray: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." As we read of the kingdom of David with its wars and bloodshed and cruelty, we long for thy kingdom of peace and good will to be established on the earth and in the lives of thy children. Help us to consecrate our talents, our knowledge, our hearts, and all else that thou hast given us, to this great end and purpose, that we may in a humble way contribute to the coming of thy kingdom, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Memory Text: Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.*—2 *Sam.* 1:23.

Explain: 5:6 Except thou take the blind and the lame. 7 The stronghold of Zion. 6:1 Again. 2 From Baale of Judah. 3 Out of the house of Abinadab. In Gibeah. 5 On all manner. 10 The Gittite. 13 When they had gone six paces. 14 A linen ephod. 16 She despised him. 17 The tabernacle. Burnt offerings. Peace offerings. 19 A flagon of wine. 23:16 Poured it out unto the Lord.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *A Chalice of Love*

We return for a moment to Mount Gilboa, where Gideon won his great victory over the Midianites, to witness the final stand of Saul and his brave son Jonathan against their relentless enemies, the Philistines. This was their final battle, and both were slain on the summit of this mountain while heroically fighting for the liberties of their country. No details of the battle have come down to us, but from the account of Saul's visit to the witch of Endor the night before, we know that he was utterly despondent. No doubt his soldiers partook of the same spirit. Under these conditions victory was impossible. The Philistines beheaded Saul and his fallen sons, and fastened their bodies to the wall of Bethshan, a town between Gilboa and the Jordan river. When the men of Jabesh-Gilead learned of this, a company went by night and recovered their bodies, and gave them

honorable burial at Jabesh. They held Saul in kind remembrance for the deliverance he had brought to them forty years before.

When David heard the sad news, he wrote a beautiful dirge in which he extolled Saul and Jonathan for their great deeds and heroic death. In this we see how generous David was to the man who had so persistently tried to take his life. This gives us an insight into David's true character. He looked for the good in men, and found it, even in his enemies.

Immediately after the death of Saul, David was crowned king of his own tribe of Judah at Hebron. The other tribes under the leadership of Abner gave their allegiance to the surviving son of Saul. But David constantly became stronger while Saul's son grew weaker. Finally he was murdered in his bed by two unprincipled ruffians, who expected to be rewarded by David. Instead, when they told the king what they had done, David ordered that they should be put to death.

All Israel now turned to David and requested that he consent to rule over the whole country. To this he consented and was accordingly crowned king of all the tribes. His long experience in leadership and war had thoroughly qualified him for the great responsibility which he now assumed. His reign was the most brilliant in Hebrew history, and was remembered from generation to generation as Israel's golden age.

His first task was to secure a central place in the kingdom for his capital. Hebron was too far south, and not suited for a basis of operations and protection from enemies. If Israel was really to become a great nation, it must have a stronghold as a rallying center worthy of the monarchy. Jerusalem, twenty miles north of Hebron, was just the place he wanted, but it was still held by a Canaanite tribe called Jebusites. David set upon this place as his capital and marched against it with his army. The city was located on

a hill and well fortified. So sure were the inhabitants of its unassailable strength, that they taunted David and told him that even their lame and blind men could keep him out. But he was so determined to take it that he gave his royal word that the man who first scaled its high walls should become the commander-in-chief of his army. Joab, his redoubtable nephew, did the deed. He reached the top and flung the enemy down and captured the place. David generously spared the inhabitants and introduced new settlers. Then he refortified Jerusalem until it became an impregnable fortress.

No more important event ever happened in the whole history of Israel than the taking of Jerusalem. With its capture a new era began. It was a turning point in the national life of the Hebrew people. But one thing remained to give the new capital the sanctity that it needed to unite all the tribes into a national unit. The Ark of God must rest there. It will be remembered that this sacred symbol of Jehovah's presence had been captured by the Philistines in a battle near Shiloh, when Eli's sons were slain. But it brought nothing but misfortune to them while they retained it in their possession, so they were glad to return it to Israel; and from that time it had been kept at Kirjathjearim, a small town about ten miles west and a little north of Jerusalem.

David now resolved to have the Ark brought to his new capital, which would make it their religious as well as their political center. But when the cart on which it was being transported came to a certain place it shook from the roughness of the road; and Uzzah, one of the drivers of the cart, without thinking of its sanctity, reached forth his hand to steady the Ark, and fell dead on the spot. David was so shocked and terrified at this evidence of Divine displeasure that he left it for a time at the house of a man called Obed-Edom.

A few months later when David learned that Obed-Edom's household was blessed by the presence of the Ark, he

recovered from his fear and decided to carry out his first intention. This time the Ark was borne on the shoulders of the priests as had been the custom in early days. After they had gone a few steps and nothing happened, sacrifices were offered. Then with great solemnity and rejoicing, with triumphal song and dance, the Ark was brought to Jerusalem. David himself took the lead in dancing "before the Lord," much to the disgust of his wife Michal, who thought that it was beneath the dignity of a king to give way to such exuberance in the presence of his subjects. Michal like her father Saul was not noted for her religious zeal. This was the beginning of Jerusalem as a holy city, which designation it retains to this day. From this time the devotion of the people was more and more directed to this city, and when the Temple was built there, it became the symbol of all that was dear and sacred in their lives.

David took up the war with the Philistines, which Saul left unfinished. Ever since before the days of Samson, these traditional foes of Israel had been a constant menace. Just where these warlike people came from originally is not known. They left no written records. Indeed, their history might have been wholly lost had it not been for their frequest contest at arms with Israel. Five cities constituted the Philistine league. They were Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gath. Of these only Ashkelon lay directly on the sea. The others lay inland on the great trunk roads between Egypt and the Euphrates.

David conquered the Philistines, the Ammonites, the Moabites and Edomites in turn. As soon as he was crowned at Hebron, the Philistines broke into Judah from their home west of the Shephelah. They took possession of Bethlehem, and threatened Hebron. David hastily called his forces together at Adullam, a place familiar to him during his outlaw days. The people rallied about him until he was strong enough to meet the enemy in open battle. Two decisive engagements were fought, and in each David won a sweeping

victory and destroyed the Philistine supremacy. The account of these and other encounters are meager, but it is certain that David threw off the Philistine yoke once for all, and we hear little of them as dangerous foes to the Hebrews after his day.

On one occasion while the Philistines were garrisoned in Bethlehem, David was reconnoitering near the enemy's outposts. The day was hot and water was scarce. He felt parched with thirst. Then he remembered the time when, as a shepherd boy caring for his father's flocks, he had refreshed himself on just such hot summer days by long deep draughts at the well by the gate of Bethlehem. The memory of those days made him sigh audibly for a drink from this well.

Three of David's captains, called "the three mighty men," heard him. Without saying a word, they started and forced a passage through the Philistine lines and brought him the water. David took the water which these three of his finest soldiers had risked their lives to obtain, and without even tasting it poured it out unto the Lord. Some have criticised this act. But it was a sublimely sacramental deed. As he looked into that cup, he saw, not the water, but a chalice of love which could look with a smile into the face of death for the man they loved. It would have been an act of selfishness to drink it. A man like David could not touch an offering purchased at such a price. Such love for and devotion to a leader, and the way that leader turned it into a religious sacrament, is one of the most beautiful and deathless things that has come down to us from those heroic days.

---

*Life's Mirror*

There are loyal hearts, there are spirits brave,
There are souls that are pure and true;
Then give to the world the best you have,
And the best will come back to you.

Give love, and love to your life will flow,
A strength in your utmost need;
Have faith and a score of hearts will show
Their faith in your word and deed.
Give truth and your gift will be paid in kind,
And honor will honor meet,
And a smile that is sweet will surely find
A smile that is just as sweet.
For life is the mirror of king and slave,
'Tis just what we are and do;
Then give to the world the best you have
And the best will come back to you.

—Bridges.

*Class Problems*

1. Tell about the death and burial of Saul.
2. How did David become king of Judah? All Israel?
3. Why did he attack Jerusalem, and how was it taken?
4. Why was this one of the important events in Hebrew history?
5. Give an account of the Ark in the hands of the Philistines. (1 Sam. 5.)
6. Why was it a wise thing for David to move it to Jerusalem?
7. Tell the story of Uzzah. Discuss it.
8. Discuss Michal's criticism of David's conduct before the Ark.
9. What effect did the removal of the Ark to Jerusalem have?
10. How can we imitate the three brave soldiers that secured the water from the spring of Bethlehem for David?

## Lesson 44

# DAVID, THE FALLEN

Lesson Text: 2 Samuel 12.

Song; Student Reading: 2 Sam. 12:1-6; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Psalms 51:9-12.

Concert Prayer: O God of purity and holiness, have mercy upon us. Help us to realize that it is impossible for us to have fellowship with thee, if we walk in the paths of sin. Give us strength for every need, and courage to call on thee for help in the hour of temptation. We live in the midst of evil, and see it on every hand. Help us to keep our thoughts pure, our words clean and our conduct holy. May we always have ringing in our ears the words of our Savior on the Mount: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Amen.

*Memory Text: Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.—Psalms* 51:1. *The* 51*st Psalm was written at this time by David and should be read.*

Explain: 4 To dress for the wayfaring man. 5 Shall surely die. 13 Thou shalt not die. 14 Occasion * * * to blaspheme. 23 I shall go to him. 24 Solomon. 25 Jedediah. 27 The city of waters. 28 Encamp against the city, and take it. 30 Their king's crown. 31 Put them under saws. Made them to pass through the brick-kiln.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Wages of Sin*

It is a sad story that we have to tell of our hero king today—much sadder than the story of the death of his loyal friend Jonathan on Mount Gilboa, while fighting against the enemies of his country. David saw the wife of one of his soldiers, and because she was very beautiful he took her for himself. Then, to get rid of the husband, he wrote a letter to Joab, who was commanding an attack on the Ammonites, and sent the letter by the soldier himself. It read as follows: "Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die." Joab carried out the king's wish, and "assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were." And fighting in that place of danger, Uriah was killed. After the days of mourning for her husband were over, David hastily sent for the wife and married her.

It must have been just at this time that David was called to the front by Joab. The Ammonite city of Rabbah had been taken and only the citadel remained. Joab urged the king to come with additional forces, and thereby gain the honor of capturing the city. David complied with his commander's request. He "gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it." Not only did he capture the city but immense spoils as well, and after enslaving the conquered people, returned to Jerusalem in triumph. His subjects generally knew nothing of the Uriah affair, and with this additional conquest he stood higher than ever in their regard. To them he was still the Lord's anointed, the "man after God's own heart."

Perhaps David flattered himself that his sin would remain concealed. Joab was loyal to him, and certainly Bethsheba, who was now his wife, would never reveal anything. It may be that she did not even know the plot against Uriah. Along with other good soldiers he had died in battle. There was nothing unusual about that. Thousands died that way every year. Everything seemed to be working out in David's favor. So it appeared on the surface. "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." And the prophet Nathan was sent to tell him so.

We see the mighty king of Israel dressed in royal robes, seated on his throne. He is well pleased with himself. The twelve tribes of his kingdom are united and loyal to him. The people are happy and prosperous. With his great victory over the Ammonites, Israel embraces an extent of territory never before attained. All his enemies have fallen before his mighty arm. Spoils and a steady stream of tributes have filled his treasury chests. The plaudits of his subjects are ringing in his ears. Was ever a monarch so blessed and favored of God?

Then like a bolt from a clear sky the blow falls Without announcement or ceremony, Nathan the prophet enters the royal chamber. The king is annoyed at the intrusion,

but motions his attendants to retire, and the two men are alone. For a moment David is alarmed, for he sees in the stern set face of the prophet that it is some serious business that he has to communicate. Can it be that Nathan intends to question him in regard to his guilty secret? He would not dare. If the prophet tries to meddle in affairs that do not concern him, he will be given to understand his place. So David resolves.

But instead of reproof, it seemed to be simply a case of injustice which he had to bring before the king. It was the case of a rich robber that spared his own flocks and herds to feed a traveler, and stole a poor man's only ewe lamb to provide food for his guest. When David heard this, his sense of right was outraged. A deed so dastardly and so heartless must be punished to the limit, as an example of the king's justice. The enforcement of the ordinary law of four-fold restitution was not severe enough. Such a ruffian was none too good for the extreme penalty, and the king with an oath affirmed: "The man that hath done this thing shall surely die."

The flash of anger was still in the king's eye, and the flush of resentment on his brow, when Nathan with calm voice and piercing eye uttered the fateful words: *"'Thou art the man!* Thou the king art the robber, the ruffian condemned by thy own voice to die as a malefactor." And the prophet put before him the enormity of his crime and his base ingratitude to God. He had taken Uriah's wife by force, murdered her brave husband and stood condemned not only by God, but by his own judgment, as worthy of death.

Brave words, these, for the humble prophet to hurl in the face of a great king! But back of these words stood God, and the poor, conscience-smitten David, utterly crushed, could only mutter: "I have sinned." The same confession that Achan had made to Joshua, Balaam to the angel, and Saul to Samuel, though in each of these cases, it was spoken more in fear than in contrition; but David was genuinely

repentant. He saw for the first time the enormity of his sin. Nathan's words seared his soul as if they had been fire. What were his victories, his kingdom, his glory? Dust and ashes, nothing more. The only thing that mattered now was his forgiveness. How different in this respect was the attitude of Saul and the others! They never saw the blackness of their sins. David did. There was sincerity in his cry; his heart was in it; his very life depended on whether God would pardon his transgression.

Nathan partially reassured him. His sin would be forgiven, but the punishment could not be wholly averted. He could not avoid suffering the consequences of the evil he had done. As we sow, so shall we reap. Even God's forgiveness cannot save us from the punishment which sin entails. David, because of his sincere repentance, was to be spared from the judgment of death which he had pronounced upon himself. But because his deed had "given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme," the child of Bethsheba should die. So the innocent are made to suffer for the guilty. How true it is that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. But in this case, the father was not to escape. For the great sin he had committed, he must suffer to the limit and drink the cup of humiliation and shame to the very dregs.

Hardly had Nathan left the king before the child began to sicken, and it grew worse and worse. David saw its agony, and his distress was overpowering. His sin was ever before him. As he looked at the suffering infant, he felt that the stripes that should have fallen on himself were being inflicted on the tender frame of his child. In his terrible remorse, he fasted, he prayed that God would spare the innocent sufferer; he lay upon the earth all night in his bitter humiliation and penitence. But the child died.

How did this tragedy happen? How did this choice man so favored of God, so beloved by his people, come to commit a sin so hideous, a crime so revolting? The fall

was too violent to have occurred at once. An ugly tumor, that distorts and disfigures the physical countenance, does not break out in all its bloated hideousness at once. For days and months and years it has been feeding on the life's blood, and weakening the body before it comes to a head. So with sin. There must be a spiritual decline before it is committed. For years David had been uniformly successful in all his enterprises. Everything he set his hand to do prospered. Wealth poured into his kingdom from every side, until he must have come to think that he could do no wrong. This led him to gratify his sensual desires, until he forgot his high ideals and lost control of his better self.

We could have wished that David's career had ended before this dreadful day. And yet, if that had happened, we would not have had the account of his penitence. We need the lesson that his life teaches. David more than any other character in the Bible has made us see the consequences of sin. And by his humility and sorrow and true repentance, he has shown us the way, and the only way that forgiveness may be obtained.

---

Ne'er suffer sleep thine eyes to close,
Before thy mind hath run
O'er every act and thought and word,
From dawn till set of sun;
For wrong take shame, but grateful feel
If just thy course hath been.
Such effort day by day renewed
Will ward thy soul from sin.
—Author Unknown.

*Class Problems*

1. What is sin?
2. Why was David's sin so reprehensible?
3. What four men in our lessons have given expression to the statement: "I have sinned?"

4. Which of the Ten Commandments did each break?
5. Uriah with other soldiers was killed in battle. Is it correct then to say that David murdered him? Why?
6. Why should David's child die for David's sin?
7. Discuss the second of the Ten Commandments.
8. Chronicles does not mention David's sin; would it have been better for 2 Samuel to omit it? Discuss.
9. The suggestion has been made that all accounts of immorality be eliminated from the Bible; would this be wise? Give reasons for your answer.
10. Comparing the sin of Saul with David's give reasons for the rejection of Saul and the forgiveness of David.

LESSON 45

# ABSALOM, THE REBEL SON

Lesson Text: 2 Samuel 15 and 18.

Song; Student Reading: 2 Sam. 15:19-21; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 2 Sam. 18:32-33.

Concert Prayer: Heavenly Father, we see in David's love for Absalom, our parents' love for us. We thank thee for that love and pray that we may be worthy of it. As we read the pitiful story of David's overwhelming sorrow, not for his son's death alone, but for his ingratitude, his cruelty, his disloyalty, our hearts go out to the stricken father, and we realize that every word and act of ours brings either pain or joy into the lives of our fathers and mothers. Help us to be worthy of all they have done for us. May our conduct be such that they will thank God we have come into their lives, and made their homes a heaven on earth, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.—Exodus* 20:12.

Explain: 15:1 Fifty men to run before him. 2 Rose. 7 Forty years. 8 I will serve the Lord. 9 Went to Hebron. 11 Called. 12 Giloh. While he offered sacrifices. 14 Let us flee. 18 Gittites. 19 With the king. 25 Carry back the ark. 28 In the plain of the wilderness. 18:1 Numbered. 3 Succour. 5 The people heard. 8 The battle was scattered. The wood devoured. 9 Met. His head. 13 Against me. 16 Joab held back the people. 17 A very great heap of stones. 21 Cushi. 22 Thou hast no tidings. 24 Between the two gates. 25 If he be alone.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Honoring Parents*

While David's repentance was deep and sincere, the shadow of his sin extended far into the future. A long train of miseries follow him the remainder of his life, brought about principally by the wickedness of his sons. One calamity was heaped upon another, and crime followed crime, until the stricken king must have longed for the peace of the grave.

Among the sons of David, Absalom was the most famous, and the most infamous. His mother was a daughter of the Syrian king, and in his early life he was the idol and pride not only of his parents, but of the whole nation, because of his charming personality. The sacred writer says

of him: "From the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." But unfortunately, his conduct did not correspond with his physical appearance and graces.

Absalom first comes to our notice by hiring some assassins to murder his older brother Amnon, who was the heir to the throne. While Amnon himself had committed a great crime, the cold-blooded way in which his brother had him put to death is so revolting that we cannot read it without a feeling of horror. Instead of punishing him as he deserved, David only banished him from Jerusalem. He remained away for two years; then at the solicitation of Joab and other friends, he was forgiven and returned home.

Restored to favor, he began a systematic campaign of undermining his father's prestige and influence. Nothing could have been more diabolic than his methods. He sympathized with those who complained of the tardiness of justice, and hinted at reforms that ought to be made. He was gracious and courteous to all who approached to make obeisance to him. He showed an admirable interest in public affairs. Early and late, he was at the gate to greet and flatter all comers. As time went on, he grew bolder and spoke of negligence in high places, and broadly hinted that *if he were king,* things would be different. And because David, since his sin, had in a great measure withdrawn himself from the public, Absalom's scheme worked. At the end of four years he was ready to proclaim a revolt against the unsuspecting king.

Taking advantage of the depth and sincerity of his father's religious nature, he asked permission to go to Hebron to offer sacrifice, because of a vow he had made. This was only religious hypocrisy on his part, for honoring God was farthest from his intentions. It was only a wicked pretense to cover his real purpose. Poor David, it was part of the chastisement that Nathan had predicted: "Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house."

The blow fell. Like a clap of thunder out of a clear sky came the news that Absalom had revolted, and had been crowned King at Hebron. Such treachery had never entered David's mind. His favorite son guilty of treason! The king was completely crushed. He recalled all the affection he had showered on his boy, the uniform kindness he had shown him, overlooked his faults, forgiven his crime, and stood by him always. And this was his reward. To satisfy his vain ambition, Absalom was ready to slay his father and plunge his country into civil war.

So successfully had Absalom sowed the seeds of discontent that for a moment it appeared that David could count on little support west of the Jordan. He might have held Jerusalem, but thought it safest to leave and let Absalom take it for the time being. His subjects east of the Jordan were loyal to him, and he felt that if he could get across the river he would be among friends. Our hearts go out to him in that sad flight from the son who is seeking his life. His courage is gone. He has no spirit, even to make a stand. He feels that the deep humiliation he is suffering is a punishment for his sin. Had Absalom overtaken him in that dark hour, he could have taken him captive without having to strike a blow.

But David had some loyal friends, who were willing to stand by him in his day of adversity. Among these was Ittai, a foreigner. When the king suggested that he return to Jerusalem and Absalom, he nobly replied: "As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." Such devotion reminds us of Ruth and is quite refreshing after the cruel treachery of the king's own son. Then there was Joab; hard, fierce, cruel Joab. Whatever else may be said of him, he was loyal to David. Many others stood by him and helped to crush the rebellion.

When Absalom entered Jerusalem unopposed, Ahitho-

phel, who had been one of David's wisest counselors but because he thought the uprising against the king would succeed, had deserted to Absalom, advised an immediate pursuit, so that the king might be overtaken and slain while he was tired and broken in spirit. This was wise counsel, and had Absalom followed it his rebellion would have been successful, but he listened to Hushai who was David's friend. He counseled delay that Absalom might gather a large army and lead it himself. This would impress the people with his greatness, and they would follow him more readily. Hushai's advice flattered the vanity of Absalom, and he was foolish enough to adopt it. This was his fatal mistake.

In the meantime David crossed the Jordan and made his headquarters at Mahanaim, where the angels met Jacob when he returned from Haran. Here men flocked to his standard from every direction, and soon a large army was gathered. With such commanders as Joab, Ittai and Ibishai to lead the attack on Absalom's forces when they came, confidence was restored and David was himself again.

Though outnumbered by many thousands, David was sure of the victory. He offered to lead the army himself, but the soldiers objected on the ground that his life was too precious to take any such risk. As they were leaving for the battle, he asked his generals to deal gently with Absalom for his sake. The contest took place in a wooded and broken country, which was familiar to the men of Gilead who were fighting in David's army, but strange to the other side. Joab attacked them from three directions and Absalom's men became entangled in the woods to such an extent that thousands were slain. Absalom was riding on a mule through the forest at full speed to escape, when his heavy hair, of which he was so proud, caught in an oak, and he was left hanging in the tree. This being reported to Joab, he hastened to the spot and in spite of the king's request slew him. This ended the battle; David's forces were completely victorious. The beautiful Absalom, slashed and disfigured

by the swords of Joab's men, was further bruised and pounded by stones, and thrown into a pit and left there to rot, like the memory of the traitor himself. It is said by Jews who have written about it, that every person who passed that way threw a stone on the heap that covered the rebel prince; and as he threw it, said: "Cursed be the memory of rebellious Absalom; and cursed forever be all wicked children that rise up in rebellion against their parents."

A great general once said: "Next to the calamity of losing a battle is that of gaining a victory." Absalom's treason cost his country the lives of twenty thousand men. No such disaster had befallen Israel since the fatal day of Mount Gilboa. But even that price was cheap. Had Absalom become king, he would have been a second Abimelech. The man who was willing to slay his father that he might step over his dead body into the throne, would have held lightly the lives of all his subjects.

And yet his father loved him and was prostrated at the news of his death. "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee," rings through the ages in the ears of men, as a sacred symbol of a father's deepest love. Hearing that cry, how can any boy or girl, wilfully and deliberately, break a father's heart, as Absalom broke the heart of David?

---

"Oh my son Absalom, my son, my son!
Would I had died for thee!" Thus up the stair
Above the gate he groaned in his despair
At tidings of the fatal victory won;
All the dark deeds which Absalom had done
Merged in sweet memories of his countenance fair;
The father's heart entangled in that hair
Whose golden sheen outvied the orient sun.
Rebel, undutiful, ingrate, unkind,
All was forgotten in that one word—Child;
So we, God's rebel children, sin-defiled,

Round our Great Father's pitiful heart entwined,
By yearning, dying love are reconciled.
—Richard Wilton.

*Class Problems*

1. How can we account for the wickedness of David's sons?
2. Give a description of Absalom.
3. How was it possible for him to win the people away from his father? (Several reasons can be given.)
4. Why did Absalom choose Hebron as the place to start his revolt?
5. Why did David leave Jerusalem? Discuss.
6. What was Ahithophel's advice to Absalom? Hushai's?
7. What fatal mistake did Absalom make? Why?
8. Tell something about Ittai; Ziba; Shimei; Joab.
9. Describe the battle near Mahanaim.
10. Give an account of Absalom's death and burial.
11. Tell about the two runners that brought the news to David.
12. Why did Joab become angry at David? Was he justified?

LESSON 46

# SOLOMON, THE WISE KING

Lesson Text: 1 Kings 3.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Kings 3:5-9; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 1 Kings 3:11-12.

Concert Prayer: Eternal Father, giver of every true and perfect gift, thou who didst say to Solomon as he stood on the threshold of his kingdom, "Ask what I shall give thee," hast also said to us, "Ask, and ye shall receive." Give us faith in that promise, and having faith in it, help and inspire us to ask for the best. We need not understanding alone, but the gift of enduring faith. Solomon with all his knowledge and discernment forgot thee and his need of thee. Father, we ask for faith; faith in our day of trouble, faith when prosperity shines upon us, faith in sickness and in health, unfaltering, unchanging faith that shall be with us to the end. For this we pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*Memory Text: But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.—Matthew* 6:33.

Explain: 2 High places. 4 Gibeon. To sacrifice there. 7 I am but a little child. Go out or come in. 9 An understanding heart to * * * discern. 14 I will lengthen thy days. 15 Behold, it was a dream. Burnt offerings. Peace offerings. 18 No stranger. 28 The wisdom of God.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *"Ask What I Shall Give Thee"*

David's glorious reign ended in gloom and sadness. The great king's last days were not his best days. They were clouded by his own incapacity and the intrigue and treachery of another son, Adonijah, who, like Absalom, could not wait for his father to die before seizing the throne. Fortunately, David, when informed by Bethsheba and Nathan of the conspiracy, had enough energy left to crush the uprising, and have a younger son Solomon crowned king.

The misfortunes which clouded the last years of David's life must not blind us to the great accomplishments and splendor of his reign. David defeated all the enemies of Israel, and extended the boundaries of his country in every direction. He gave the kingdom a central stronghold for both its civil and its religious life. He brought wealth and

culture into the life of the nation, and opened up avenues of commerce with other kingdoms, and was an ardent patron of music and poetry. His name has been definitely associated with the Psalter, being himself the author of many of the psalms. He was a skilled musician, as is attested by the fact that Saul brought him to his court to sing and play for him.

In late years many critics have arisen, who have endeavored to belittle the achievements of David. But it would have been impossible for him to have become the national hero, and his character idealized to such a degree that the Messiah himself was expected to be like him, if he had not done something truly great. Call to mind the devotion of men to him. Three men risked their lives to get him a cup of cold water. The fierce and cruel Joab was loyal to him. Jonathan gave up his crown because of the great love he had for him. Add to this his wonderful chivalry, his mental powers, his military genius, his ability to command, and above all, his deep and sincere piety, and there is small wonder that later generations of Israel looked back upon him as the greatest of all their heroes. We are not blind to his faults, but they must be judged by the moral standards of his age, and not by the teachings of Christ. The great message that he has left us is his devotion to God. His trust in God was the deepest and truest thing in his life. He gave God credit for all his successes, and all the good he did was due to his religion. When he sinned, his repentance was so deep and so sincere that God could not withhold his forgiveness.

It was such a kingdom that Solomon inherited, and such a man that he succeeded. Solomon must have been about twenty years of age when his father died, but we know little else about him. There is no vivid personal portrait of him such as we possess of his father. It appears from the records that Nathan had charge of his education, and that David had promised Bethsheba that Solomon

should succeed him. Whether Adonijah knew about this arrangement we are not informed. It seems not to have been generally known. Nathan knew it, however, and lost no time in having the conspiracy crushed, and Solomon crowned, when he saw what was happening.

Solomon seems to have realized fully the tremendous responsibility that was thus suddenly thrust upon him. At the same time, he had a mind of his own, and did not hesitate to put out of his way the men who might have made trouble for him in holding his kingdom. Even Adonijah was put to death when it appeared to the new king that he was scheming to make trouble. The aged hero Joab was also slain for plotting against him. These executions, though they look cruel to us, may have been necessary, just as was the death of Absalom, to secure peace and tranquility in the kingdom.

When Solomon had crushed all those who might have made trouble for him, and he was firmly established on the throne, he repaired to the "High Place," at Gibeon, about six miles northwest of Jerusalem. A "High Place" was generally the flat top of a hill where there was a sanctuary. Nearly all towns had one. There was an altar, and the worship consisted of prayer and sacrifice. Gibeon was especially sacred because the Tabernacle of the Congregation was located there. Taking his stand before the brazen altar, he offered a thousand animals as a sacrifice to God. No doubt he was inspired by intense devotion, and a yearning desire to rule his kingdom well, as he went through this religious ceremony. Perhaps all day long there was a prayer in his heart for divine guidance.

During the night God appeared to him in a dream and said: "Ask what I shall give thee!" Solomon already realized the magnitude of his task, and was mistrustful of his ability to measure up to the high standard set by David. He thanked God for the kindness shown to his father in giving him a son to sit on his throne. Then with a touchingly humble confession: "I am but a little child: I know

not how to go out or come in." He asked for an understanding heart to judge between right and wrong in guiding the great multitude of people he had been called to rule.

It was an unselfish request, and the Lord was pleased with Solomon. He might have asked for a long life, which was so highly valued in those days, or great riches and honors. Instead of this, he pleaded for "an understanding heart, to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad;" and God freely granted him the lesser gifts. He was promised a reign of unprecedented greatness. His wisdom should exceed the wisdom of all who had gone before, or who should come after him.

This is one of the most inspiring incidents of Solomon's reign. What high thoughts he must have cherished at that time! How humble he must have felt! As he thought of the great man who had preceded him, and the unnumbered multitude he was to rule, he felt unequal to the task, and asked for help. It seems simple enough in his case. We instinctively say, "that is just what he ought to have done."

But how about ourselves? We too are standing at the threshold of our "kingdom." God is also holding open the treasures of heaven to us. He is saying to each of us: "Ask what I shall give thee." Are we answering as wisely as did Solomon? Or, are we too wise and confident in our own conceit to see the need of divine aid? Thousands of young men and women today, with a mission as sacred as Solomon, are blinded by the glamor of cheap allurements. They snatch at glittering bubbles, or Dead Sea fruits. So they fail to attain the best gifts, because they do not earnestly desire them, or it may be because they do not believe that God is making the same offer to them that he made to Solomon.

Perhaps we should not stress the gift of wisdom as the supreme good. Because of Solomon's sad ending, it might be proper to question the sufficiency of wisdom to bring happiness and perfect success. There is a tendency for

"learning" to scoff at humility. There came a day when Solomon did not feel that he was "a little child," and needed God to guide him. Perhaps it would have been well for him to have added to his request, a desire for continued faith in God. He failed to leave a united and loyal kingdom because he lost God as his companion. He thought he could walk alone with his "wisdom," and choose his own path, without further obligation or allegiance or need of the God who had given him all he had.

So, when in our dreams God speaks to us and says, "Ask what I shall give thee," we should ponder well our answer. "Greatly begin," is a fine motto, but let us make safe with the ending also. The prizes are not given until the race is won. Solomon was bigger that night at Gibeon, when he humbly pleaded for wisdom, than when his name was famous in many lands as the symbol of earthly glory and greatness; but "his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father."

---

*Our Days*

Damsels of Time the hypocritic days,
Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes,
And marching single in an endless file,
Bring diadems and fagots in their hands.
To each they offer gifts after his will,—
Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds them all.
I, in my pleached garden, watched the pomp,
Forgot my morning wishes; hastily
Took a few herbs and apples, and the Day
Turned and departed silent. I, too late,
Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn.

—Emerson.

*Class Problems*

1. Give an account of Adonijah's conspiracy.
2. How was the conspiracy put down?

3. What prominent men were slain by Solomon? Justify these executions.
4. Describe the Tabernacle of the Congregation. (Ex. 26, 27.) The Ark (Ex. 25:10-22.)
5. Where was Gibeon, and why did Solomon go there to worship?
6. Relate Solomon's dream and his request.
7. Why was the Lord pleased with him?
8. What lesson may we derive from this incident?
9. What great lesson may we derive from David's life?
10. Discuss the selection from Emerson.

1 LESSON 47

# SOLOMON, THE BUILDER

Lesson Text: 1 Kings 5 and 8.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Kings 8:27-29; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 1 Kings 8:57-58.

Concert Prayer: O Lord, we thank thee for our lesson today. We read with delight the inspired words of reverence and adoration spoken by Solomon at the dedication of the holy temple which he erected in Jerusalem three thousand years ago. We are grateful for the countless number of sanctuaries built to thy name, in all lands and among every people since that time. We thank thee for the sacred edifices among us today. Help us to revere these places of worship, where we may meet with thee, and learn how we may have thee with us always. Create a love in our hearts for these sacred altars—these houses of God. May we love to go there for prayer and worship and fellowship with thee. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.—Habakkuk* 2:20.

Explain: 5:1 Hiram. 3 Could not build an house. 6 Sidonians. 7 Blessed be the Lord. 9 Convey them. 11 Twenty measures. 13 Thirty thousand men. 17 Great stones. 8:1 Chief of the fathers. 4 Tabernacle. 7 The staves. 8 Unto this day. 9 There was * * * stone (See Heb. 9:4.) 10 The cloud. 12 Thick darkness. 15 Spake * * * unto David. 23 And he said. 51 Furnace of iron. 60 That all the people. 63 Two and twenty thousand. 64 Peace offerings. 66 Unto their tents.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *A Home for God*

With the beginning of Solomon's reign, a new era dawned for Israel. Great changes took place in the life of the nation. From a pastoral and agricultural state, they developed also into a mercantile people. Palestine lay on the highway between two great continents, and Solomon took advantage of this to make his country a clearing house for trade. In addition to this, he built a fleet which carried the products of his country to foreign ports and returned with gold and all kinds of luxury. This contact with other nations brought increased wealth and splendor, especially to Jerusalem, which became one of the great cities of the world. Solomon also began a great building program. Previous to

this time, the people had lived in a most primitive fashion, but now, following the example of the king, wealthy men built better and more comfortable homes. In addition to the great temple, which we shall speak of presently, Solomon built a magnificent palace for himself, and other immense buildings such as had never been seen in Jerusalem before.

While all this made a fine showing, it also gave rise to two serious evils which led to disaster later. One was forced contributions from the people to supply the king with means to carry on his great projects, and the other was forced labor to erect his buildings. This had a tendency to create class distinctions and social inequality. Extremes in riches and poverty came into existence, and great discontent among the poor naturally followed.

Contact with other nations and expansion in trade and commerce had another result. It brought about a great intellectual awakening. Before this time, there had been little literature in Israel. Now a great literary movement began, which gave rise to the "wisdom" literature in the Old Testament. The first to take form was that of Proverbs. These wise sayings are both practical and human. They have universal application. Prophets and priests also began to write, and the whole mental life of the nation matched itself against the learning of Egypt and the East.

But it is the building of the great Temple that we are particularly interested in today. David's dearest wish had been to erect a temple to God. He felt that it was a reproach for him to dwell in a palace, while the Ark of God dwelt between curtains. So he made unheard-of preparations for the great undertaking. But just as he was ready to begin, Nathan warned him that God's sanctuary must not be built by a man whose hands were red with the blood of many wars. He was promised, however, that the work should be accomplished by his son. While David was not permitted to build it, he gathered much of the means necessary for its erection, and left a solemn injunction upon Solomon to begin the work as soon as possible.

The new king threw his whole soul into the enterprise. It commanded all the zeal and energy that a lover of magnificence could give it. He felt that the task was fraught with immense issues, not only for his own people, but for the whole world. And in this view he was not mistaken, for the Temple left an impress on the very name of Jerusalem, that has made it the symbol of holiness to both Jews and Christians in all generations since that day.

The materials which David had gathered for the building were of priceless value. He had consecrated to God the spoils which he won from conquered kings. But he left no architects, no skilled workmen, no timber, and very little stone that was suitable. Fortunately, however, Solomon inherited from David the friendship of Hiram, king of Tyre. The two kings became great friends, and Hiram put at Solomon's disposal the skilled labor of an army of Sidonian wood-cutters and artisans. Huge trunks of cedar and cypress were cut from the heights of Lebanon and laboriously dragged by road or river to the shore. There they were constructed into immense rafts and floated a hundred miles to Joppa, where they were again dragged with great toil up the steep and rocky road to Jerusalem. For more than twenty years while Solomon was building the Temple and other great structures, this work went on, and Jerusalem became a perfect hive of industry.

Compared with great temples and cathedrals now, Solomon's Temple was not large, but in that early age, with the handicaps in transportation of materials, it was a stupendous undertaking. Mount Moriah, hallowed by the tradition of Abraham's sacrifice, was selected as the site. The rugged summit of this Mount had to be enlarged to a space of five hundred yards square, and this level was supported by high walls, which today are the wonder of all who see them. There is not space here to go into details of this immense undertaking, but the more we study it, the more the wonder of its accomplishment grows on us. One of the finely beveled stones in the east wall is 38½ feet long and

7 feet high and weighs more than a hundred tons. Part of the old wall rises 30 feet above the soil, but 80 feet of its entire height lies hidden under the accumulated debris of the often-destroyed city.

The Temple, when completed, was 90 feet long. The front porch was 30 feet wide and 35 feet deep. There were two important rooms in the Temple. The outer, called the Holy Place, was 30 by 60 feet and 45 feet high. This contained an altar for burning incense, a table for shew-bread, and ten lamps which burned continuously. Back of this was a room called the Holy of Holies, 30 by 30 by 30 feet. This contained the Ark and the cherubim. These rooms were lighted by windows set near the roof. A court surrounded the building which measured 380 feet by 260 feet. This court contained the altar of burnt offerings, a basin of bronze "lavers" for washing, and two great pillars 25 feet high and 6 feet in diameter. The building proper was surrounded on all sides by side chambers of three stories.

The Temple was not used as a gathering place for people to worship, as are modern churches. It was a sacred shrine where God dwelt, and only the priests were permitted to enter the Holy Place, or the Holy of Holies.

It took seven years to complete the Temple, and when it was finished a great dedication service was held in Jerusalem, an account of which is given in chapter eight of our text. It consisted, first of all, in the transfer of the Ark to the Holy of Holies. It will be recalled that we have had occasion to mention this symbol of God's presence many times. From the days of the wilderness, it had been the most sacred object in Israel, and it was fitting that it should have as its final resting place the Holy of Holies in the Temple. After this ceremony, Solomon made a great address to the thousands who were assembled, and then offered his glorious dedicatory prayer. Every sentence of both the address and the prayer breathes a spirit of gratitude and reverence. No one can read his words without a feeling of nearness to God, and a desire to serve him.

The question may be asked, what real good did this Temple do, and why do we build churches and temples today? The best answer is that they are erected to bring us into contact with the Unseen. In them we catch a flame direct from God. Our spirits meet his Spirit, and there comes to us a flush of happiness, a thrill of satisfaction, a sense of peace. Our hunger is appeased by heavenly bread, and we emerge from the sanctuary strengthened and refreshed. To dwell an hour or more each week in the holy place of the Most High is one of the supreme delights of the spiritual life. To be warmed and fed in such a place is heaven come to earth.

---

*God's First Temples*

The groves were God's first temples,
Ere man learned
To hew the shaft and lay the architrave
And spread the roof above them—
Ere he formed
The holy vault to gather and roll back
The sound of anthems—in the darkling wood
Amid the cool and silence he knelt down
And offered to the Mightiest solemn thanks and supplication. —W. C. Bryant.

*Class Problems*

1. Name some of the changes that took place in Israel during the reign of Solomon.
2. What effect for good did these changes have? For evil?
3. Why was David not permitted to build a temple?
4. What preparations did he make for it?
5. Who was Hiram, and what contract did Solomon make with him?

6. Enumerate the difficulties that had to be met in building the Temple. Where was it located?
7. Mention incidents connected with the Ark that we have so far considered. (See also 2 Sam. 15:24-26.)
8. Mention some of the outstanding statements in Solomon's address and prayer at the dedication of the Temple.
9. Give some good reasons for the building of temples and churches.
10. How should these places be treated?

LESSON 48

# REHOBOAM, THE FOOLISH KING

Lesson Text: 1 Kings 12:1-24.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Kings 12:12-15; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 1 Kings 12:16.

Concert Prayer: Father of grace and truth, thou God of might and wisdom, we confess that we are often weak and foolish. Many times, like Rehoboam we lose the best of our inheritance because we listen to ignorant and pleasure-loving companions. Lead us to those who are wise in experience and rich in knowledge, that we may sit at their feet and learn wisdom. We thank thee for the holy scriptures, that fountain of truth and life that has come down to us from the distant past. Help us to heed its warnings, and learn to our profit the lessons taught in its sacred pages. Amen.

*Memory Text: Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.—James* 1:12.

Explain: 1 Shechem. For all Israel * * * king. 2 Dwelt in Egypt. 4 Made our yoke grievous. 7 If thou wilt be a servant. 10 My little finger. 11 Scorpions. 15 The cause * * * Lord. 16 What portion. Now see * * * house. 17 Children of Israel * * * Judah. 18 Stoned him. 19 Unto this day. 20 The tribe of Judah only. 23 The remnant of the people.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Folly of Youth*

Solomon himself was responsible for the disintegration of the kingdom of Israel after his death. He had in mind to establish a kingdom of such magnificence and glory that it should endure from generation to generation, a light to all nations. But he was too short-sighted to see that such a kingdom as he aimed at and maintained during his lifetime, could not be continued by so small a nation as Israel. The great buildings and palaces which he erected exhausted the strength and life of the people. The despotic power and tyranny which he exercised over his subjects in forcing them to labor on his vast projects without compensation created a feeling of resentment, that was bound to manifest itself at the first opportunity. Add to this the heavy burden of taxes which he levied, especially on the northern tribes, and we see the reason for the revolt.

Then, too, he lost the support of the prophets and the religious element in Israel by his marriage to women of other nations. This led to the introduction of idolatry. Each wife asked for a shrine to be set up in Jerusalem so that she could worship her own god. And Solomon must have satisfied all of them. So we find him, perhaps attending the temple services in the morning, some other imported religion in the afternoon, and going with his Egyptian wife to a third in the evening.

Solomon did not fall in a day. His heart was not turned from the Lord at once. It was a gradual process. He was so set on making alliances with other nations; of establishing commercial relations; of adding wealth and glory to his kingdom, that he forgot his allegiance to the God of his father David. First, through the influence of his foreign wives he grew tolerant of their methods of worship. He became "broad-minded," as we call it today. From that, it was only a step to utter indifference to all religion. His earthly kingdom became his all in all. He gained the world, but lost his soul. And the kingdom he gave his life to establish and make glorious crumbled to pieces at the touch of his successor. It is a sad story. What an opportunity he had! What an enduring monument he might have reared! His splendid beginning, so promising, so inspiring, to flicker and go out in utter darkness is one of the great tragedies of Hebrew history.

Rehoboam, who seems to have been Solomon's only son, succeeded to the throne in Jerusalem without opposition. But the northern tribes were not so ready to accept a son of Solomon. Instead of going to him at the capital, as they had gone to David, they demanded that he come to Shechem, so that they might bring certain grievances to his notice before they formally ratified his succession. When the assembly met they told Rehoboam that they would accept him as their king, if he would lighten some of the heavy burdens which his father had placed upon them.

Evidently Rehoboam had given this matter no consid-

eration, for he asked for time to consider it. Three days were agreed upon. In the interval he consulted the aged counselors of his father as to what his answer should be. They saw the danger and advised him to conciliate them. Whether they meant for him to grant the petition is a question. The old men may only have intended that he should give them a civil answer. Their advice may have meant: "Tell them that you are their servant, and they will go home satisfied. Then you can do as you please after that." We might really expect such deception from men who had been Solomon's counselors. It resembles modern politicians who are "long on promises, and short on performance."

But when the king consulted the young men who had been his companions at court, there was no ambiguity in the answer which they advised him to make. It amounted to this: "Tell them that you do not intend to give up forced labor. It is a sacred right of the crown, such as the king of Egypt has always enjoyed. Tell them that your little finger shall be thicker than your father's loins, and that instead of the whips he used, you will chastise them with leaded thongs. That will show them that you mean to rule as a king should rule."

If Rehoboam had received the least political training, or been endowed with an ounce of common sense, he would have known that blustering arrogance at such a time would be fatal. But the insensate advice proved attractive to the conceited king. He accepted it and actually repeated the very words to the dissatisfied assembly. The effect of this incredibly foolish reply can be imagined. Like a trumpet blast sounded the cry: "What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David." Unable to still the tumult himself, the king sent "Adoram, who was over the tribute," to see what he could do to mollify the indignant people. A worse selection could not have been made, for this man represented in his person the odious system of enforced labor to which they objected; "and all

Israel stoned him with stones, that he died." When the foolish king saw that the man who had grown gray as the chief agent of despotism was dead, he felt that it was high time for him to get away, and fled with headlong speed to Jerusalem.

So was broken forever the unity of Israel. The twelve tribes that, united, might have stood successfully against the world, became two mutually antagonistic kingdoms, and each did everything in its power to destroy the other. While Rehoboam continued to rule over Judah, part of Benjamin, and a scattered remnant of Simeon in the far south, Israel immediately chose Jeroboam, an Ephraimite, to be their king.

Thus it came about that a grandson of the mighty David found his kingdom shrunken to a mere tribe. Had Rehoboam been a man like his grandfather he might have grappled to himself the affections of his people, and bound them to him as with hooks of steel, by promising to ease their burdens and giving them assurance that he would study their peace and welfare. But he was too blind to see this, and so lost the great opportunity of his life.

We are surprised to read in the text that the division of the kingdom was "from the Lord." Everything that happened during the next four hundred years seemed to disprove that statement. Looking at it from a human standpoint, nothing could have been more disastrous. What were the two petty kingdoms that were left after the division, constantly contending and fighting each other, compared to the mighty empire of David and Solomon? Think of Judah, a paltry fragment—one tribe dissevered from the magnificent unity of Israel. Practically all that was left of it was Jerusalem and the Temple. And Israel was little more; discordant, fighting among themselves, one dynasty ruling after another, and final oblivion. What is there in such a picture to warrant the statement that it was "from the Lord"?

We have to look deeper than the surface to answer the

question. The Lord was not so much concerned about his people establishing a large and powerful political kingdom. There were already plenty of those, and many others would follow. What the Lord wanted was a people that through suffering, exile, bondage and death should find and establish on the earth a heavenly kingdom. That little petty kingdom of Judah, "despised, and rejected of men," with no assets save its Holy City and its Temple, gave a light to the world that still shines. Besieged, taken by enemies, sacked, destroyed again and again, but ever rising anew after each disaster, it still persists. Earthly kingdoms have risen and passed away, empires have come and gone again; but Jerusalem with all its holy memories, its prophets, priests and men of God, is with us still.

---

*Awareness*

God,—let me be aware.
Stab my soul fiercely with others' pain,
Let me walk seeing horror and stain,
Let my hands, groping, find other hands.
Give me the heart that divines, understands.
Give me the courage, wounded, to fight.
Flood me with knowledge, drench me in light.
Please—keep me eager just to do my share.
God—let me be aware.

—Miriam Teichner.

*Class Problems*

1. In what way was Solomon responsible for the disruption of Israel?
2. Give an account of Solomon's decline. His death.
3. What were the grievances of Israel at the time of his death?
4. Why was it necessary for Rehoboam to go to Shechem?
5. Tell all you can about Shechem.

6. What request was made of Rehoboam?
7. What was the advice of the old men? The young men?
8. Which did Rehoboam adopt? Why?
9. What was the result?
10. What great lesson may we learn from Rehoboam's experience?
11. Discuss the statement: "It was from the Lord."

1 LESSON 49

# JEROBOAM, THE SON OF NEBAT

Lesson Text: 1 Kings 12:25-33; 14:1-20.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Kings 12:26-28; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 1 Kings 14:15.

Concert Prayer: O thou Eternal Father, in whose image we are created and destined for high and holy purposes, we read the sad story of Jeroboam, who not only sinned himself, but "made Israel to sin," and tremble lest we shall fail and be lost to the better ends of life. We do many things that we ought not to do. and fail to do other things that we ought to do. We are not sure of ourselves, but need thy protecting care to watch over us. Wilt thou ever bring to our remembrance thy great commandments, that we may become valiant champions for righteosness, and walk in holiness from day to day? We pray for thy name's sake. Amen.

*Memory Text: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?—Romans 7:23-24.*

Explain: 12:26 Now shall * * * David. 28 Two calves of gold. Thy gods. 29 Bethel * * * Dan. 31 A house of high places. Of the lowest of the people. 32 The feast. 33 Of his own heart. He offered upon the altar. 14:2 Shiloh. 3 Take with thee. Cruse. 9 Above all that were before thee. 10 Shut up and left. Will * * * remnant. 13 He only * * * grave. 17 Tirzah. 19 The rest of the acts. 21 Forty and one years old. His mother's name. 23 Images. 24 Sodomites. 25 Shishak.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Punishment of Sin*

The people of Israel were naturally democratic. Their first kings, Saul, David and Jeroboam, were all of lowly origin, and were selected by the people to rule over them solely because of their ability. It was written of Jeroboam that he "was a mighty man of valour." Even before the death of Solomon he had been designated by the prophet Ahijah as the future king of the ten tribes. This, coming to the ears of the king, made it necessary for him to flee for his life. He took refuge in Egypt, where he was well received by Pharaoh and soon became a favorite of the

court; and if tradition is correct, married the sister of the Egyptian queen.

When Solomon died, he returned to his own country and became a leader in the revolt against Rehoboam. Subsequently he was selected and crowned king of the northern tribes, in 937 B. C. There is no evidence that Jeroboam was a religious man himself, but he saw the great influence that religion had on the people. Without consulting the prophet Ahijah in regard to the matter, he established natural sanctuaries at the ancient shrines of Bethel on the southern boundary of his kingdom and Dan on the northern boundary. In each of these places he set up the golden image of a bull, with imposing ceremony. This he did to wean the hearts of the people from the sacred altar and temple at Jerusalem. Since most of the Levites refused to officiate at these altars and repaired to Jerusalem, he proceeded to ordain his own priests from the ranks of the common people to take their places.

From a political standpoint, and leaving God out of account, this action may have been wise. Jeroboam felt that if the people continued to go up to the gorgeous temple in Jerusalem, they might return to the old monarchy and perhaps put him to death. Later, in order to satisfy the social cravings of the people, he also instituted with great pomp and ceremony, the yearly festivals of Israel at these shrines. In these innovations which led to such disastrous results, there is no evidence that Jeroboam intended to apostatize from the worship of Jehovah. These images were not meant to be substitutes for God, but symbols of his strength.

But God had promised Jeroboam that he would be with him, and would establish for him a sure house; and he should have trusted in that promise. His sin was the sin of worldly policy. Like Saul he lacked faith that God could protect his throne. He was afraid of Jerusalem and the temple, when as a matter of fact, had his subjects been permitted

JEROBOAM'S WIFE AND THE BLIND PROPHET

His own blindness and the woman's disguise could not hide from the prophet the identity of his royal visitor. Nor could the present she brought turn aside the stern judgment of Jehovah. The face of the queen and her gesture indicate how deeply her heart has been wounded. She knows that her son will not live; she feels even now the weight of doom pronounced upon her house by the old Ahijah.

to go up and worship there as God desired, his kingdom might have been extended to include all Israel instead of only ten tribes; for Rehoboam was none too popular even in Judah. His policy of complete separation was a fatal mistake. To bolster up his throne, he deliberately sacrificed the higher religious interests of the people. Not only did he sin himself, but he "made Israel to sin." It was a blow from which the northern tribes never recovered. One by one the kings that followed him walked in his footsteps, and the people followed their example.

Jeroboam was made aware of his sin in a most dramatic manner. He was living with his queen at Tirzah when his eldest son Abijah fell sick. Greatly concerned for his recovery, the king sent his wife to Shiloh, where Ahijah the prophet lived, to inquire of him what the outcome of the sickness would be. The king was careful to send a good supply of provisions with his wife to the prophet, in the hope that they might influence him to give a favorable answer to the anxious mother.

It is strange how trouble brings us to God. Jeroboam had ignored the prophet and his advice in all the important changes which he instituted in the religion of Israel. He felt that he was perfectly capable of deciding the place and method of worshiping God for himself and his subjects. But this was different. His dearly beloved son, the heir to the throne, was seriously ill, and the anxious father came back to God for help. But because he knew how displeased the prophet must be with his conduct, he was afraid to meet Ahijah himself; so he sent his wife in disguise to ask for the recovery of her son.

The prophet's eyes were dim on account of age, but he had been divinely forewarned of the queen's coming, and the Lord had made known to him the answer he was to give. Terrible were the tidings he had for her. They were not relieved by a gleam of hope or a single expression of pity. Jeroboam was reproached and denounced for his

ingratitude to God, and the prediction made that his house should be exterminated. His children's dead bodies should be left unburied and be devoured by vultures and wild dogs. And as for Abijah, the moment the feet of his mother reached her home, he was to die. This was to be the only act of mercy in the tragedy, for it would take the young man away from the terrible days to come, because in him alone out of the whole family had God seen something good. And finally, the prophet predicted that Israel should be smitten and rooted out of the good land which the Lord had given to their fathers, and scattered beyond the river, "because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin."

What a long train of woes may follow the acts of one man. A doom is pronounced not only on the apostate Jeroboam, but upon the people he made to sin. God had taken this man from the ranks and given him a kingdom because of the idolatry of Solomon. Jeroboam knew this, but proved himself a greater idolator than the man he replaced, for he made his subjects idolators also. Where much is given much is required, and Jeroboam failed to measure up commensurately with what he had received.

There is one passage about this tragic story that has brought consolation to many thousands of parents who have been bereaved of their children. Abijah was taken early in life because of the good which the Lord saw in him. From this we see that early death is not necessarily a sign of divine disapproval. Length or brevity of life is of little consequence, when "at the best, the longest life is but as one tick of the clock in the eternal silence." From the statement of the Lord concerning Abijah, we may rest assured that all is well with that great host of God's children who have died in their youth. Honorable age is beautiful, but length of years is not a true measurement of life.

*True Measurement of Life*

We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best;
And he whose heart beats quickest lives the longest,
Lives in one hour more than in years do some
Whose fat blood sleeps as it slips along their veins.
Life is but a means unto an end; that end,
Beginning, mean, and end of all things,—God.
The dead have all the glory of the world.

—P. J. Bailey.

*Class Problems*

1. Give an account of Ahijah's prophecy. (1 Kings 11:28-38.)
2. What was the character of Jeroboam?
3. What great sin did he commit when he became king?
4. Do you think Jeroboam's intentions were as bad as the results? Why?
5. What can you say of his policy from a political standpoint?
6. How did Jeroboam show a lack of faith?
7. Give an account of Abijah's sickness and death.
8. What did the prophet Ahijah say concerning Abijah, that has brought great comfort to parents?
9. How should life be measured? Give examples.

LESSON 50

# JADON, THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET

Lesson Text: 1 Kings 13.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Kings 13:7-9; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 1 Kings 13:26.

Concert Prayer: O Lord, we thank thee for the warning and admonition of this lesson. The experience of the unfortunate prophet teaches us that temptation comes in different guises. We may be strong one hour and weak the next. There is no safety but in thy constant fellowship. In the long road ahead, with its many pitfalls and dangers, wilt thou guide us safely to the end. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.—James* 1:12.

Explain: 2 Josiah. Offer. 3 A sign. 8 I will not * * * thee. 11 There dwelt * * * Bethel. 22 Shall not come * * * fathers. 24 A lion. 28 The lion had not eaten. 31 Lay my bones.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Failure in Little Things*

Jeroboam had a plausible excuse when he suggested to the people that they change their center of worship from Jerusalem to Bethel and Dan. "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem." He wanted to make it convenient for them. The Holy City, with its old songs, its happy memories, its tender reminiscences of former friends, of the great David, and of young Solomon, must be forgotten because the distance was too great. How thoughtful of their interests! How concerned for their welfare!

We wonder when he made these adroit and subtle appeals to their own selfish interests, that there was no protest from any prophet or religious teacher among his own tribes. How could Ahijah wait until the mischief was done, and the people turned to idolatry, before he spoke? It hardly seems possible. Jeroboam must have been warned several times before he deserved the terrible judgment of doom pronounced upon him in the last lesson.

But only one case is recorded. After he had successfully completed his idolatrous stroke of policy, a prophet of God out of Judah stood before him at the Bethel altar. His name is not given in the Bible, but Josephus calls him Jadon. No prophet would be welcome to Jeroboam, especially one from the southern kingdom. But before the king could say a word, the prophet had delivered a message of destruction and desecration against the altar.

The man would have been put to death, had not God intervened to save him. Jeroboam raised his hand to order his arrest, and found it paralyzed and useless, while the altar was rent by some invisible power, and the ashes poured out. In great fear, the king asked the man of God to entreat the Lord that his hand might be restored. The prophet did so, and the hand was healed.

So far the man of God had done his work well. He had not hesitated to brave the fury of the proud king and denounce the altar at the very moment when the king was burning incense upon it. This took great courage, and he could reasonably feel that the worst was over, and that he might now relax a little without danger.

But there was another temptation which he had to meet, more dangerous in some ways than the first, that of bribery and flattery. When the king saw that force had failed, he tried to take the edge off his humiliation by offering to feast and entertain the prophet. This was a great compliment. Not many men are invited to dine with a king. To many it would have been a great temptation. But the prophet was proof against it. He told Jeroboam that if he would give half his house, he could not accept his invitation, for the Lord had said to him: "Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest."

It will be noticed that the prophet had been instructed in regard to three things: first, to make his pronouncement against the altar, which he faithfully did; secondly, not to

eat bread or drink water on the place; and thirdly, not to return by the same way that he came. In refusing the king's hospitality he was carrying out the second requirement. And to fulfil the third, "he went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Bethel." It looked as if his mission would be a complete success.

But an old prophet was living at Bethel, and his son told him what had occurred. Struck with the apparent faithfulness of the man of God, he followed after him to invite him to return to his house. The fact that he had not reproved Jeroboam himself is evidence that he acquiesced in what the king was doing; and since he was disloyal to the true religion himself, he was willing to tempt another to be unfaithful also.

He found the man of God sitting under an oak and invited him to come home with him and dine. The man repeated the same words that he had used to the king, but the old prophet was not to be put off so easily. He lied to the man of God by telling him that an angel had said to him: "Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water." Deceived by this plausible statement from a prophet, the man of God went back and ate bread and drank water in his house. It would have been well for him if he had inquired a little more carefully into a message which was in direct opposition to the word of God himself. With terrible swiftness he was made aware of his mistake. While the two were lodging in Bethel, the old prophet, by the spirit of inspiration, told him that because of his disobedience he should perish and his body should be buried in a strange grave. Accordingly, when he had gone a short distance from Bethel, a lion killed him, and the prophet buried him in his own grave.

There is a great moral lesson in this story. The man of God had a particular mission to perform. The Lord told him just what he must do, and just what he must refrain from doing. He could not go wrong if he followed

instructions. The tragedy is that he strictly carried out the most difficult part, and failed in the easiest part of his duty. It was by the neglect of the details that he fell. The man faced death unflinchingly to perform his duty, and yielded to temptation in a minor matter. But is not this the very region where so many of us fail? Men do the big things, the main duties of life with vigor and dispatch. If bravery is required they are brave, if courage is needed they are courageous; but in some little matter at home or among friends, they are ill-mannered, peevish, quick-tempered, disagreeable, easily provoked and hard to live with. In these things even the man of God often fails. We should learn as soon as possible that exact obedience, attention to little things, involve principles of the highest importance. There are certain prohibitions in which every person should literally follow the commandment given to the prophet: "Eat no bread, nor drink water there."

Another thought should be mentioned in connection with this story. It is dangerous to linger in the neighborhood of temptation. Many men would never fall, if they hurried away from certain places. It is also well to beware of purported inspiration that coincides with our own secret desires. The man of God was hungry, and it was easy for him to believe that an angel had asked him to go and eat. Satan himself can quote scripture for his purpose, and that purpose corresponds with our own idols; it is easy for us to forget our real mission. The man of God from Judah had received a distinct injunction, which even the king could not make him disobey. But when the old prophet came with his plausible story of a message from an angel, which was in harmony with his own desires, he was willingly led astray. We should be on our guard against sham inspiration, if it is contrary to the well-known commandments of God. The man of God knew what he had been asked by the Lord to do. The reason for doing it still existed; the prohibition of eating and drinking had not been with-

drawn; and purported revelation furnished no excuse for him to vary one iota from what he had been commanded to do.

---

*Give Us Men*

God give us men! A time like this demands
Strong minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands;
Men whom the lust of office cannot kill;
Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy;
Men who possess opinions and a will;
Men who have honor; men who will not lie;
Men who can stand before a demagogue
And damn his treacherous flatteries without winking;
Tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog
In public duty and in private thinking.

*Class Problems*

1. What reasons have we for thinking that Jeroboam must have been warned several times?
2. What did the man of God predict against the altar at Bethel?
3. What happened to Jeroboam?
4. Why did the prophet refuse the king's offer of hospitality?
5. Why did the old prophet at Bethel follow the man of God?
6. Relate the conversation after he overtook him.
7. How do you account for the fall of the man of God?
8. The statement is made in the lesson: "Eat no bread, nor drink water there." What does it mean?
9. Should a person flee from temptation, or remain and fight it to a finish? Discuss.
10. What effect did this experience have on Jeroboam? (See 1 Kings 13:33-34.)

## Lesson 51

# ELIJAH, THE TISHBITE PROPHET

Lesson Text: 1 Kings 16:29-34; 17.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Kings 17:12-14; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Psalms 19:1.

Concert Prayer: Eternal Father, we come into thy presence today conscious of our indifference and lack of zeal in thy cause. We are deeply impressed with the intense earnestness and faith of Elijah. In a generation of apostasy and idolatry, he stood alone, bold and unafraid in defense of righteousness and thy holy name. Uncouth, unlearned in the wisdom of men, he was a living flame of fire against the sins of Israel, and king and court trembled at his rebuke. O Father, help us to be like him. Give unto us his loyalty, his courage, his zeal for the honor of thy great name. Amen.

*Memory Text: I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.—Jer.* 31:3.

Explain: 16:31 Served Baal. 34 Build. The word of the Lord. (Joshua 6:26.) 17:1 Of the inhabitants of Gilead. Said unto Ahab. 3 Hide thyself. Brook. Before Jordan. 4 The ravens. 9 Zarephath. 12 As the Lord * * * liveth. May eat it and die. 18 To call * * * to remembrance. 19 A loft. 20 Hast thou * * * evil? 21 Stretched himself.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Zeal for God*

The seeds of idolatry planted by Jeroboam had done their work. About fifty years have passed since the death of the first king of the ten tribes, and already six men have occupied the throne. Ahab, the present ruler, has married a Sidonian princess, and she has practically turned the whole nation over to the worship of Baal. Most of the prophets of Jehovah have been slain by her orders, and the religion of Israel is dead in the land. It was an easy step from the worship of the images of bulls to the worship of other idols. Jeroboam succeeded better than he anticipated in weaning the people away from the sacred city of Jerusalem and the holy temple, with its Ark and Tabernacle and other shrines. All interest in this central place of worship is gone, and not one voice is raised in defense of the true faith.

Yes, one. Suddenly, without any preface or introduction, the mighty figure of Elijah bursts upon the scene as a flash of lightning at midnight. Like the great Melchizedek, he seems to have come "without father, without mother, without descent." We have no record of his birth, and when his work was done he left the scene of his ministry without tasting death. He was called a Tishbite, but there is no record of such a place as Tishbi. All we know is that he came from Gilead, that land of romance and beauty beyond the Jordan. He appears and disappears without any announcement or warning, but leaves a wholesome fear in the hearts of all idolators whenever he came in contact with them.

On his first appearance at the court of Ahab, he made one startling announcement and was gone before anyone realized the full significance of what he said: "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." That was all, but it was enough. Moses had said that drought would be God's punishment for idolatry. This was a declaration of the fulfilment of that prediction.

The message of Elijah marked the beginning of more than three years' famine, one of the very worst recorded in the history of Israel. The distressed people reaped the fruit of their apostasy, but instead of turning to the Lord in the spirit of repentance, they blamed Elijah for their suffering and hunted for him that he might be put to death. Jezebel, particularly, sought his life; but God had warned him to flee beyond Jordan and there he was safely hid "by the brook Cherith," from which he obtained water, and the Lord provided him with food.

As the famine grew more severe, the brook dried up and once more God intervened to save Elijah's life. The word of the Lord bade him go to the Sidonian city of Zarephath in Phoenicia, where a widow would care for him. This was in the very heart of Jezebel's own land and she

would be less likely to look for him there than within the borders of Israel. He arrived after a long and dangerous journey, faint with hunger and thirst. Near the city gates he saw a woman gathering sticks and asked her for some water; and as she went to fetch it, he called to her again and asked also for a morsel of bread. The poor woman had to confess that she had no bread, but only a handful of meal and a little oil in a cruse. She told him that she was gathering sticks to make one last meal for herself and son, and then lie down and die.

Elijah, strong in faith, told her to have no fear, but first supply his urgent needs, and after that make a meal for herself and son; promising her at the same time that until God sent rain the barrel of meal should not waste nor the cruse of oil fail. She believed his promise and for many days, perhaps nearly two years, he remained at her home, "And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail," according to his promise.

After a time the widow's son grew grievously sick and at last died. The woman was beside herself with grief and terror. She felt that Elijah must have come to bring her sin to remembrance before God, and so cause him to slay her son. The prophet could not bear to have her think ill of him, and said: "Give me thy son." He took the child to his chamber, and after an earnest prayer, he stretched himself upon the body three times as though to breathe into his lungs and transfer to him his own vital warmth. And he continued to cry to the Lord, saying, "I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again." His prayer was answered; the boy came back to life. Carrying him to his mother, he gave him into her arms again, with the simple statement: "See, thy son liveth." The overjoyed woman confessed her faith in him as a man of God, and also that Jehovah was the true God.

There is a great lesson in the story of Elijah that many of us miss. As we have seen, he was on fire with zeal for

the honor of Jehovah, and had not the least patience with the apostasy of the people. There was no excuse for it that he could see, and he proposed to bring them back to their allegiance in a drastic manner. Let rain be withheld from the land as an evidence of Jehovah's displeasure, and famine would bring them to their senses. So he thought. But it had the opposite effect. Instead of bringing the people to repentance, it made them more bitter and sullen.

Elijah had some lessons to learn also, and God permitted him to learn them in the school of experience. The brook Cherith was part of that experience. In this lonely retreat, he could get nearer to God by meditation and prayer. He was shut out from the world and the work he was anxious to perform. He could commune with no one but himself and God. The busy world with its din and noise passed him by, while he waited with what patience he could the outcome.

But God had another experience for him. Under the scorching sun the brook dwindled until no water remained. Then the prophet was commanded to flee to Zarephath, outside the borders of his own land, and accept the hospitality of one whom experience had taught him was an enemy of God. He was to receive protection from an idolatress, a subject of Jezebel's father.

What Elijah thought of this arrangement we are not told, but he had learned obedience, and did not hesitate to go where he was sent. As he passed by stealth, through northern Israel, he saw suffering and distress on every hand because of the severity of the famine, but no sign of repentance. He must have wondered at the strange perverseness of God's children. How blind they were! Had they not read the word of the Lord to Moses (Deut. 11:16-17), that if they turned to other gods, he would shut up the heaven and there would be no rain? And yet with this terrible judgment upon them, they wilfully continued in their

idolatry. Elijah had no sympathy for such deliberate wickedness.

But the prophet himself had something to learn. God had a purpose in sending him to Zarephath. He wanted to show him that he was interested not alone in the people of Israel, but cared for even a poor Gentile widow. We gather this from the words of Jesus when he said that in those days there were many widows in Israel, yet Elijah was not sent to them, but to a Sidonian idolatress. By meeting her, he learned to sympathize with another race than his own, and his stern nature must have been mellowed by the contact. God was trying to teach him that while the Elijah spirit might be needed at times, it was far from the Christ spirit. In that same place where Elijah met the widow, Jesus came many centuries later to extend his mercy to the Syro-Phoenician woman, whose faith was greater than the faith of his own people.

---

*High Souls*

Give thanks, O heart, for the high souls
That point us to the deathless goals—
For all the courage of their cry
That echoes down from sky to sky;
Thanksgiving for the armed seers,
And heroes called to mortal years—
Souls that have built our faith in man
And lit the ages as they ran.

—Edwin Markham.

*Class Problems*

1. What effect did Jeroboam's religious innovations have on Israel fifty years later? Discuss.
2. Tell all you can about Ahab. (1 Kings 16:29-34.)
3. Tell about the first appearance of Elijah.
4. Quote his statement to Ahab.

5. What proof have we that it was at Elijah's request that rain was withheld?
6. What effect did the famine have on the people?
7. Does punishment make people good? Discuss.
8. Tell of Elijah's experience at the brook Cherith. Where was it?
9. Why did he leave there? Where did he go?
10. Mention the incidents connected with his stay at Zarephath. Where was this place?
11. What effect did these experiences have on Elijah?
12. What is the message of this lesson to us?

✓ OK.

## Lesson 52

# ELIJAH, THE COURAGEOUS PROPHET

Lesson Text: 1 Kings 18.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Kings 18:17-21; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 1 Kings 18:36.

Concert Prayer: Eternal God, the same yesterday, today and forever. We realize that the contest at Carmel is perpetual. The champions of Baal are never conquered. Jezebel is forever urging them to destroy thy prophets and teachers. People all around us halt between two opinions. Father, give us courage this day to enlist in thy cause. Help us to dedicate our lives to the accomplishment of thy purposes in the earth. We thank thee for the inspiration that comes to us from the great souls of the past. In the light of their lives may we fight for truth and righteousness until Baal has finally fallen and Christ is king. Amen.

*Memory Text*: *And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God.*—1 Kings 18:39.

Explain: 1 In the third year. 3 The governor. Feared the Lord. 4 Cut off the prophets. 12 The Spirit * * * thee. 17 Art thou he * * * Israel? 18 Baalim. 19 Carmel. The prophets * * * of the groves. 21 Halt. And the people. 22 I, even I only. 24 Your gods. The God that * * * fire. 25 Dress it first. 26 Leaped upon. 27 Talking. Pursuing. 28 Cut themselves * * * lancets. 29 Prophesied. The evening sacrifice. 30 The altar * * * down. 31 Twelve stones. 32 Measures. 33 Fill * * * with water. 39 The Lord * * * God. 40 The brook Kishon. Slew them there. 42 Cast himself down. 43 Seven times. 44 Like a man's hand. 45 There was a great rain. 46 The hand of the Lord * * * Elijah. To the entrance of Jezreel.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *God or Baal*

For three years and six months Elijah remained in seclusion. All efforts to trace him, or locate his whereabouts, had failed. In the meantime things had reached a crisis in Samaria. The "sore famine" lay like a withering curse on all the land. No grass grew on the blistering plain, most of the cattle and sheep were dead from hunger. People were starving and dying for want of water. Unless rain came soon, the miserable kingdom would be utterly ruined.

But at this critical juncture, the word of the Lord came to Elijah, "Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth." Without hesitation or fear of consequences, he left his place of concealment at the Sidonian widow's home and entered his own stricken land. The first man he met was Obadiah, the king's minister, who secretly was loyal to Jehovah, and had concealed and fed a hundred of the prophets whom the wicked queen had sought to slay. Elijah sent a summons to the king by the hand of this minister: "Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here."

The meeting of the two opposing forces in Israel was dramatic. A burst of anger sprang from the king's lips. "Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel?" he bitterly exclaimed. Elijah did not quail in the presence of royal wrath. "I have not troubled Israel," was his courageous answer; "but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."

Elijah was now in a position to give orders to the king, and he commanded that all Israel be summoned to Mount Carmel, and there he would singly meet in their presence all the prophets of Baal, and it would be decided by contest, whether Baal or Jehovah should be the God of Israel. Ahab accepted Elijah's challenge, and messengers were sent in every direction to notify the people of the royal proclamation that called them to Carmel on the following morning.

No more suitable place could have been selected for the enactment of the mighty drama which Elijah staged on that never-to-be-forgotten day, than the summit of Mount Carmel. Projecting as a great promontory sixteen hundred feet high out into the sea, it commands a view in every direction so varied and so beautiful, that no spot can equal it in all the Holy Land. To this day it is carpeted with flowers of every hue, and covered with impenetrable foliage of many varieties of stately trees, and shrubs of all kinds.

1600 feet high.

The name means "Garden of God," and travellers say that it is "still the fragrant, lovely mountain that it was of old," with its many hidden dells and flowering glades.

On this ever memorable morning, let us stand on the summit for a moment and view the scenes around us. Looking eastward, thirty miles or a little more, we see the gleaming Sea of Galilee, its shores one day to be the home of him who was to save the world. As the eye turns a little southward, there is the valley of Esdraelon and Mount Tabor rising like a monument from the plain. Farther southward still is Jezreel, Ahab's summer home, and Gilboa, and Ebal and Gerizim with Shechem between the two, and Shiloh father south, and other mountains and villages. All familiar places, associated with happy memories of God's mercies to Israel in the days that are gone, but now blistering with heat, and cursed with famine!

Turning our faces to the north, we behold the great Mediterranean, dotted with ships from every port, coming to and going from the great commercial cities of Tyre and Sidon, thirty and fifty miles away. There is no famine in these large centers of trade. Wealth of every kind, and food of all varieties are pouring into them from many lands. These strongholds of Baal are blessed with abundance and prosperity, the like of which the land of Israel has never known. Thus we stand facing two great lands, the kingdom of Baal and the kingdom of Jehovah. Around us now are gathered a multitude of people, and at our side is the prophet of Jehovah, in solitary grandeur, confronted by four hundred fifty prophets of Baal. And the king of Israel is there with all his court. No such assembly has ever been gathered before or will ever be again. Even those present have not the least conception of the mighty principle in religion that is to be settled that day.

It is a tense moment. Every eye is turned on the stern and uncompromising prophet of the desert, the sole representative of Jehovah's power. Pitted against him are not

only the prophets of Baal, but all the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them. The contest seems to be unequal. What can one man do against the world? But Elijah has no fear of the outcome, for the God of Israel is at his side.

And now he speaks, and the tones of his voice pierce their souls. It seems as if Carmel is shaking under their feet. A single sentence, but how significant! "How long halt ye between two opinions? If Jehovah be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." What can they answer to that searching question? Awe-struck and ashamed, they stand in hushed and painful silence. Carried by the Spirit of God, the words strike deep into their hearts, and great fear grips the entire assembly.

Then Elijah laid down the conditions of the contest. "The prophets of Baal," he said, "are four hundred and fifty: I stand alone as a prophet of Jehovah. Let two bullocks be provided for us; they shall slay and dress one, and lay it on wood, but they shall put no fire under. I will slay and dress the other, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under. Then let all you priests of Baal cry to your idols; I will call on the name of Jehovah. The god that answers by fire let him be God."

All the people saw that this was a fair challenge, and they murmured assent. But the hearts of the priests of Baal must have sunk within them. They had no such faith in the power of Baal as Elijah had in Jehovah. Their cause was lost before it began. They knew this; and, of course, Elijah knew it. But they made a desperate effort to go through with it, and put on a bold face to the very last. All their prestige, and perhaps their very lives, depended on the outcome. Elijah pursued his advantage at every step of the proceedings, belittling their god and humiliating them in the eyes of the people. At last, when all their efforts proved useless, he dramatically demonstrated in the eyes of the assembled multitude the power of Jehovah

over Baal, for fire came down from heaven and consumed his bullock.

The people were convinced, and fell on their faces and cried: "The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God."

The contest on Mount Carmel was one of the most important events in the history of Israel. In it lay the germ of the monotheism that would one day grip the heart of the world. If Jehovah was more powerful than the mighty Baal, then it was easy to believe that he was stronger than all other gods. From that conception it was but a short step for the prophet Amos to declare that Jehovah was God not only of Israel, but of all the nations of the earth. And that was one of the greatest religious conceptions ever given to the world.

---

*God*

Thou art, O God, the life and light
Of all this wondrous world we see;
Its glow by day, its smile by night
Are but reflections caught from thee:
Wher'er we turn, thy glories shine,
And all things fair and bright are thine.

—Moore.

*Class Problems*

1. Locate and describe Mount Carmel.
2. Mention the places that could be seen from its summit in the days of Elijah.
3. Why did the prophet call the people to gather at that place?
4. What was Elijah's challenge?
5. Give a full account of the efforts of the priests of Baal to call down fire from heaven.
6. Give an account of Elijah's preparation for the test, and his success.

7. Was there justification for putting the priests of Baal to death? Discuss.
8. Tell in detail how Elijah secured rain.
9. What great religious truth grew out of this event?
10. In what respect is the contest at Carmel still carried on?

LESSON 53

# ELIJAH, THE DISCOURAGED PROPHET

Lesson Text: 1 Kings 19.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Kings 19:1-4; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 1 Kings 19:10.

Concert Prayer: Dear God, thou hast revealed thyself, not only in the thunders of Sinai, but in more quiet ways. Teach us that the still small voice is a better revelation of thy true character than earthquake, wind and fire. Mercy falls upon us like gentle rain, and loving kindness as the dew from heaven. We do not forget that thou art a God of justice, but we remember first that thy name is Love. The revelation of thy Son has taught us that thy glory is to save thy children and not to destroy them. For this great truth, we love and praise thy name. Amen.

*Memory Text: The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.—Jer.* 31:3.

Explain: 2 Then Jezebel sent. 3 And when he saw that. Beersheba. 4 Into the wilderness. A juniper tree. Requested * * * might die. 6 Coals. 8 Horeb. The mount of God. 11 The Lord passed by. 12 A still small voice. 13 He wrapped his face in his mantle. 14 I have been very jealous. 15 The wilderness of Damascus. Anoint. 16 Jehu the son of Nimshi. 17 The sword of Hazael. The sword of Jehu. Shall Elisha slay. 18 I have left. Kissed him. 19 With twelve yoke. His mantle. 20 What have I done to thee? 21 The instruments of the oxen.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Still Small Voice*

After his overwhelming victory over the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel, Elijah imagined that the battle for the supremacy of the God of Israel had been won. The power of Jehovah over Baal had been demonstrated in a manner so striking that the most skeptical must be convinced. And as final proof of God's power, the whole country had been flooded with rain, in answer to Elijah's prayer. But before the day was over, the prophet was to learn that neither the power to call down fire from heaven or an answered prayer for rain could affect the obdurate queen. Whether Baal had been defeated or not, she at least was not defeated, and Elijah should not escape her vengeance.

In her way Jezebel was as much in dead earnest as the prophet was, and as soon as she heard the terrible news from Carmel, she sent a messenger to Elijah to say: "As sure as thou art Elijah, and I am Jezebel, may my gods avenge it upon me if on the morrow by this time I have not made thy life like the life of one of my own murdered priests." From our knowledge of the prophet up to this time, we would have expected him to treat this message with complete indifference. Surely the man who had dared to stand against the king and four hundred and fifty priests of Baal would have no fear of one woman's threat.

But it had just the opposite effect. Fear and deep depression gripped him. And we are told: "When he saw that, he arose, and went for his life." We are amazed at this desertion of Elijah from his post of duty. It was just the time that he was most needed. He had made a tremendous impression on the people, and they were in a mood to carry through the reform he had begun. Had they not confessed the supremacy of Jehovah? Surely the tide had turned against idolatry, and all that was necessary was for him to lead the movement. It was Elijah's great opportunity to accomplish the very thing that was so near his heart, viz., the destruction of idolatry in Israel.

How can we account for his failure in this crisis? It was partly a mental reaction from the tremendous strain he had been under at Carmel. There his spiritual power had risen almost to heaven itself. He felt that he could sway the mind of the nation to his purpose, and that the kingdom was conquered for Jehovah. The message of Jezebel disillusioned him. In the discouragement that followed he lost his bearings. He imagined that the queen spoke for all the people, when, as a matter of fact, she spoke only for herself. But Elijah felt that he had failed. And in utter dejection and despair he fled, not so much for the fear of his life, but as a confession of defeat. How many

thousands are like him in this respect. They give up just at the moment of victory.

Elijah fled to the south. First to Beer-sheba, Isaac's old home, nearly a hundred miles away. There he left his servant while he plunged into the desert wilderness farther to the south. He went on and on, as if he were fleeing not from Jezebel, but from himself. He wanted to forget his loneliness, his despondency, and prayed that he might die because his life had been a failure. He crossed and recrossed the paths where Israel had wandered in the wilderness for forty years, and at last reached Sinai, the Mount of God, where the Law had been revealed to Moses, the very Law that it was Elijah's mission to restore to Israel.

Elijah took shelter in a cave of Sinai, perhaps the very "cleft of the rock," where Moses had stood when the Lord covered him with his hand, as his glory passed by. In this secluded place, the word of the Lord came to him, saying: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" What indeed! He was doing nothing; and in the meantime Jezebel was busy. She was overawing the people of God, and snatching from Elijah all the fruits of his labors. "What doest thou here?" There are no idolaters or breakers of God's commandments at Sinai. Elijah has not yet grasped the full meaning of the question. He excuses himself. He has been jealous for God while the children of Israel had forsaken his covenant, and slain his prophets with the sword, and he only is left, and they seek his life also.

Then came the magnificent revelation, one of the profoundest and most spiritual in the Old Testament. Elijah had been using force as his weapon of conversion. And he had failed. Force had left the people hard and indifferent. To convince Elijah that his method was wrong, God tried it on the prophet himself. He visited the mountain with a hurricane that rent the place where he was standing and broke the gigantic rocks in pieces. Next an earthquake shook the base of Sinai itself, and the mountain trembled.

Then came a fire which overwhelmed the prophet with its lurid light and destructive force. But Elijah was unmoved by any of these demonstrations of God's power. After this, there was a great calm, and he heard "a still small voice." And now in the hush and gentleness of the deep silence, the prophet felt that God was near, speaking to his troubled soul.

Amazed and overwhelmed, he wraps his face in his mantle and stands at the entrance to the cave. There again he hears the reproachful question: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" While he has not yet fully grasped the meaning of the vision, and answers as before, the Lord makes clear the reason for his failure. Certainly the killing of Jezebel's priests would be resisted. If he can kill, so can she. Force begets force. Hate awakens hate, and compulsion is met with compulsion. We do not love God because he shows his power in earthquake, wind and fire. Famine may ruin a land, but it wins no allegiance from the people. The forces of nature have their work to do, and may be necessary at times to vindicate God's power, but they seldom change men's conduct.

Elijah's methods did not work, even on himself. God was not in wind and fire. He sensed him only in the "still small voice." In that voice was peace to his soul. Despondency, despair and failure were gone, and he lived again. To be sure he might still have to rebuke the recreant king and pronounce the judgment for his sins, but he would never forget the lesson he had learned at Sinai.

God reveals to him that he is to be inactive no longer. There is still a great work for him to do. Three commands are given him: To anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, Jehu to be king of Israel, and Elisha to be his successor. And then to comfort Elijah, the Lord makes known to him that he has still seven thousand left in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal. The prophet is content and returns with joy to his work.

What a wonderful chapter this is! The "still small voice" foreshadows in a most striking way the teachings of Christ. They that take up the sword shall perish by the sword. Mercy, kindness, gentleness are to rule the world. The message of Elijah, however, was not love but truth. He was stern and inflexible, but his moral earnestness must never be forgotten. With him right was right and wrong was wrong, and there could be no compromise. Would that we all had the courage to stand as unflinchingly for our ideals as he did for his.

---

The raging fire, the roaring wind,
Thy boundless power display;
But in the gentler breeze we find
Thy Spirit's viewless way.
The dew of heaven is like thy grace,
It steals in silence down;
But where it lights, the favored place
By richest fruits is known.

—Herder.

*Class Problems*

1. What reason did Elijah have for thinking that the battle was won with his victory at Carmel?
2. What was the reaction of Jezebel?
3. How did Elijah receive her message?
4. How do you account for his despair?
5. Relate an experience he had on the desert. (See 1 Kings 19:4-8.)
6. What question did the Lord ask him at Sinai?
7. What vivid demonstration did the Lord give him that he had used the wrong method to convert Israel?
8. What is meant by the "still small voice?"
9. What new commission was given to Elijah?
10. What important message is there in this lesson for us?

## Lesson 54

# NABOTH, THE JEZREELITE

Lesson Text: 1 Kings 21.

Song; Student Reading: 1 Kings 21:1-3; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 1 Kings 21:20.

Concert Prayer: O God of life and light, help us never to wrong a brother. May we realize that every man we meet is thy son, and if we injure him, we are sinning against thee. There are times when to benefit ourselves and promote our own welfare, we belittle the conduct and achievements of others. Give us strength to overcome this weakness. From the story of Ahab's sin against Naboth and his terrible punishment, may we always remember that as we measure unto others, so shall it be measured unto us again. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.—Matt. 7:12.*

Explain: 1 After these things. 3 The inheritance of my fathers. 8 Unto the elders * * * nobles. 9 Proclaim a fast. Set Naboth on high. 10 Set two men. Sons of Belial. Blaspheme. Carry him out. 15 Take possession. 18 Behold * * * vineyard. 19 In the place. 23 The dogs * * * Jezebel. 26 Amorites. 27 Went softly. 29 I will not bring.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Standing With the Weak*

Ahab was a great builder. He beautified Samaria which his father had made the capital of the northern kingdom. Besides his royal residence in that city, he erected another magnificent palace in Jezreel, located on a spur of Mount Gilboa, about twenty miles northeast of Samaria. This palace was unique in its splendor, and the pride of Ahab's heart. He lavished upon it all the wealth he could command. Not satisfied with the building itself, which was inlaid with ivory, he planned pleasant gardens to surround the palace, so that it would lack nothing in being the most beautiful place in the whole kingdom of Israel.

A man by the name of Naboth owned a vineyard that adjoined the king's palace, which he needed for his garden. Ahab offered a fair price for it, or, if Naboth preferred, he would give him a better vineyard in exchange. But he

refused to sell. The vineyard was an inheritance from his fathers, and this, in accordance with the Law of Moses, made it wrong in his judgment to let it go out of his possession. Ahab knew that Naboth was within his rights and he should have accepted the inevitable and tried to find a garden elsewhere. But he could not bear to be thwarted in his plans. He came into the house "heavy and displeased," flung himself on his divan, and would not eat.

Jezebel came in and found him in this mood. When she learned the trouble, she broke into a scornful laugh. "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel?" she asked. "Arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." Her words implied what she had in mind to do, but Ahab made no protest. He was willing to reap the benefits of Naboth's death, if he had no share in bringing it about. Jezebel reminds us of Lady Macbeth when she said to her fearful husband: "Infirm of purpose, give me the daggers!" While Ahab had no "daggers" to give his wife, she did very well without them.

Her crime was particularly revolting. She wrote a letter in Ahab's name from Samaria to the chief officers in Jezreel, ordering them to proclaim a fast as though to avert a calamity, and place Naboth in a conspicuous place in the assembly. Then they were to secure two false witnesses who were to accuse him of blasphemy against God and the king. On this testimony he was to be condemned and dragged outside the city with his sons, where all were to be stoned to death.

Her instructions were carried out to the letter by the subservient officers. Their willingness to execute such a vile command is a striking proof of the corruption which existed in Israel at that time. On the same evening Jezebel received a message that Naboth and his sons were dead. With no heirs left to inherit the property, it reverted to the crown, and the wicked queen lost no time in telling Ahab.

From a painting by T. M. Rooke

AHAB AND NABOTH

Naboth is pruning his vines when Ahab appears to bargain for the vineyard. The fact that Ahab has to argue even with his royal robes and crown on, and the fact that Naboth hardly stops his work to listen, are a clear index of the feeling that existed between the democratic Israelite and the tyrant, with his imported notions of the divine right of kings.

"Arise," said the triumphant murderess, "take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead."

Ahab made no inquiry as to how his death had been brought about. All that he was interested in was to get possession of the vineyard, and he lost no time in getting to Jezreel. The journey down there is interesting, for behind his chariot rode two young officers, Jehu and Bidkar, who were destined to play an important part in overthrowing his dynasty a few years later, when Jehu became king and Bidkar his chief commander. Ahab little dreamed of that, however, on this glorious morning when he was to take possession of his long coveted vineyard.

Ahab had attained the fulness of his desires. Now he could complete his beautiful summer residence, garden and all, as he had planned. Everything had turned out better than he could have hoped. But his joy was short-lived! At the gate of the vineyard like the angel at Eden stood the swart figure of Elijah. Six years had passed since that awful day at Carmel, and the king had hoped that he was rid of the stern prophet forever. But here he was, to snatch the fruit of his crime away from him at the very moment when he had come to enjoy it. We can imagine the intensity of the bitter cry that escaped him: "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"

"I have found thee," said the prophet, "because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord." Then Elijah told him that his house should be extinguished. The dynasty should be cut off to the last man. Where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, there they should lick his blood, and dogs should eat the wicked Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. "Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat."

This terrible imprecation fell like a thunder bolt on the wicked king. He forgot about his garden, his palace, his

kingdom, everything, except the awful judgment that had been pronounced upon his head. It is doubtful whether he ever entered the vineyard again. Certainly he never found the joy in its possession that he had anticipated. It must ever after have been haunted by the ghosts of his murdered victims.

It is strange how the wicked quail before the righteous. There was the great and powerful king, with two warriors at his side ready to do his bidding. One word from him and the tongue of Elijah would have been silent forever. But not a word escaped him. He cowered before the unarmed prophet as he listened to the torrent of words that crushed him, and then shrank away to clothe himself in sackcloth, and walk with bare feet and bowed head, in penitence and humiliation for his sin.

We notice in this lesson how terrible is the retribution that comes to a man who injures another. Much as God hated the idolatries of Ahab and Jezebel, it was not until they committed this great wrong against Naboth that the fall of their dynasty was predicted. God is on the side of the weak. That was the great message of the prophets of Israel. Of all the crimes that Ahab committed, none left a deeper brand of shame upon his memory than the judicial murder of Naboth and his sons to obtain the vineyard which he coveted.

From this we may safely conclude that God expects every young man and woman who loves him to stand for the weak and helpless. In this world there are many who are unfortunate. We have in every community the poor, the crippled, the feeble, the subnormal. These are in need of champions who will come to their defense when unkind remarks wound their feelings or unjust attacks are made against them. When we defend the weak and helpless, we are defending God. Jesus went so far as to say, that if we showed kindness unto one of the least of his brethren, we showed kindness unto him.

*Abou Ben Adhem*

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold:—
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said,
"What writest thou?"—The vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answered, "The names of those who love the Lord."
"And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerily still; and said, "I pray thee, then,
Write me as one who loves his fellowmen."

The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had blessed,
And, lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

—Leigh Hunt.

*Class Problems*

1. Was Naboth justified in refusing to sell his vineyard to Ahab? Quote the law. (Lev. 25:23; Num. 36:7.)
2. Relate in detail the way that Jezebel secured the vineyard.
3. Do you think that Ahab knew what his wife intended to do? Why?
4. Why is Jezebel compared with Lady Macbeth?
5. Tell about the meeting of Ahab and Elijah.
6. What did Elijah say to the king?
7. What effect did it have on Ahab?
8. What is the message of this lesson to us?

1 LESSON 55

# ELISHA, THE MAN OF GOD

Lesson Text: 1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 4:8-37.

Song; Student Reading: 2 Kings 4:18-21; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 2 Kings 4:37.

Concert Prayer: Our Father in heaven, wilt thou create in us a spirit of contentment and joy in the work that we have been called to do. May we realize that all of us cannot attain fame and distinction. Help us to see that private soldiers are as necessary in the army that is fighting for righteousness as are captains and generals. Give to us a desire to choose the simpler and more necessary work in thy kingdom. Among the many who must labor in quiet and obscure duties, give to us a useful and happy part. We ask it in the Savior's name. Amen.

*Memory Text: For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.—Luke* 14:11.

Explain: 19:19 With twelve yoke. His mantle. 20 What have I done to thee? 21 The instruments of the oxen. 4:8 A great woman. 10 A chamber * * * on the wall. A stool. Candlestick. 13 He said unto him. What is to be done for thee? I dwell * * * people. 19 My head! 23 Neither new moon, nor sabbath. 24 Slack not thy riding. 26 It is well. 29 Gird up thy loins. Salute him not. Lay my staff. 35 He returned.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Contact With a Prophet*

It will be remembered that Elijah was instructed at Sinai to return and anoint Elisha as his successor. He found him plowing in the field, and as he passed by he cast his mantle on him. Elisha immediately left his oxen and ran after Elijah, but asked permission to go back and kiss his father and mother goodbye, and then he would follow the prophet. Elijah answered: "Go back again: for what have I done to thee?" By that statement he did not mean to reprove Elisha as some have supposed. He gave him full permission to return. Elijah had but cast his mantle over him, nothing more. This was a call, but Elisha himself must make the decision. So Elisha understood it. He returned and killed his oxen, boiled the flesh, and invited the people to a farewell feast. After that he bade goodbye to his parents and kinsmen and became a follower of Elijah

until the great prophet was taken from the earth. After that he took his master's place.

The two men were very different in character and disposition. Elijah had no home. No family ties bound him to any particular place. He lived most of the time alone in some cave or other secluded spot, coming generally from no one knew where to deliver his message, and then vanishing again like lightning. Elisha, on the other hand, lived among the people and was the companion and friend, not only of the lower classes, but of kings and rulers as well. He did not have as great a message as Elijah, nor did he have his predecessor's zeal and moral earnestness. But it must not be supposed from this statement that he was weak or that he compromised with sin. Only his methods were different than those used by Elijah, and better adapted to the times in which he lived. However, it is no disparagement of the great work he accomplished to say that he did not leave the impress as a prophet on Israel that was left by Elijah.

A great many miracles are attributed to Elisha, some of which seemed to have no particular spiritual value, while others were very suggestive and faith-inspiring. One of the most noted is the raising from the dead of the Shunammite woman's son. It illustrates in a striking manner the friendliness of Elisha and the great faith of the stricken mother.

Shunem was a small village three miles north of Jezreel on the slopes of Little Hermon. At this place lived a woman of wealth and influence, whose husband owned land surrounding their home. Shunem was also the home of the beautiful Abishag, the nurse of David's old age. As he journeyed to and fro among the school of the prophets, Elisha often passed this way and was entertained by the good woman and her husband. Finally they built a little private chamber for the prophet on the flat roof of the house. They furnished it with a bed, a chair to sit on, a

table and a lamp. Here the weary prophet often found a simple and delightful resting place.

Elisha was grateful for the kindness with which they treated him, and was anxious to do something for them in return. He told his servant to call the woman. In deep humility she came and stood in his presence. Instead of speaking to her himself, he asked his servant to thank her for all that she had done for them, and inquire if he should say a good word to the king for her. She replied with great dignity: "I dwell among mine own people." By this she meant that she was quite content and had no desire of any notice from the king. She had her husband, her home and her daily work. This was sufficient. If this woman's spirit should take hold of all people, what a blessing would be realized by every soul. It is covetousness that disturbs the world, and makes for sin and unhappiness everywhere. The king could not give this woman as much as he would take away from her. She had found her work and place; she was of some consequence where she was, and might be of no importance in another place.

Elisha was not satisfied and asked Gehazi what could be done for her. The servant, a keen observer, had discovered the sorrow of her life, and called attention to the fact that she had no child. "Call her," said the prophet. She came back and stood in the door. "When the time comes round," he said to her, "you shall embrace a son." This unexpected promise filled her heart with joy. It seemed too good to be true. "Nay, my lord, thou man of God," she exclaimed, "do not lie unto thine handmaid." But the prediction was fulfilled, and the Shunammite woman became the happy mother of a son.

Years passed, and the child grew old enough to go out to his father. One day as he played in the field, he had a sun stroke and cried: "My head, my head." The father, not realizing how serious it was, said to a lad: "Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought

him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out."

Many accounts of dying children have been written, but it is doubtful whether a more graphic account of a small boy's death can be found anywhere than is here set forth. Every parent who has lost a child can sense the dread and sting of death in every clause. We can feel in the brief but vivid description the terrible agony of the anxious mother as she waits with abated breath the outcome. And when the child is dead, she grimly carries her boy to the prophet's room, closes the door on him, and walks away. Not a tear is shed, but a great resolve grips her soul. The prophet who promised her the child must give him back to her again.

The good woman of Shunem had lost her son, but she had not lost her faith. Without even telling her husband that the child was dead, she asked him to send her one of the animals, for she must go to the man of God immediately. He mildly protested, but she brushed aside all his objections and was on her way. The distance to Mount Carmel was sixteen miles, and she ordered her servant to drive the animal at full speed. "Slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee," she said.

Elisha from his retreat on the hill saw her coming and asked his servant to run and meet her and inquire if all was well with her husband and child. But she did not stop to talk with the servant; her business was with his master, and she hurried on until she reached Elisha and flung herself at his feet. "Did I desire a son of my lord?" she asked, "did I not say, Do not deceive me?" Elisha guessed the truth and immediately sent the servant to hasten and lay his staff upon the child. But the broken-hearted mother refused to leave Elisha, so the prophet arose and followed her. On the way, Gehazi met them with the news that the boy was still dead. The staff had been ineffective in restor-

ing life. Elisha hurried on and found the child dead on his bed, as the servant had said. After earnest prayer, he stretched himself over the body of the child. Soon it grew warm with returning life, and after pacing up and down the room, Elisha once more stretched himself over him. Then the boy opened his eyes and sneezed seven times. "Take up thy son," he said to the overjoyed mother; and she fell at his feet in speechless gratitude.

We are impressed here with the supreme faith of this good woman. Death itself could not destroy her implicit trust in the power that Elisha had with God. She had the faith that removes mountains, and verified the great truth which was later stated by Jesus: "If you canst believe, *all things are possible to him that believeth.*" Every boy and girl should seek contact with a person who can inspire a faith in their lives such as Elisha gave to the Shunammite woman. Elisha asked if he should speak for her to the king. But how small was any favor that a king could bestow compared with the priceless gift of faith which she received from the prophet. Surely, the woman selected wisely when she chose to remain among her own people and entertain a prophet, instead of seeking favors from the king and court.

---

*Influencing Others*

No stream from its source flows seaward,
How lonely soever its course,
But some land is gladdened.
No star ever rose and set
Without influence somewhere.
Who knows what earth needs
From earth's lowest creatures?
No life can be pure in its purpose
And strong in its strife, and all lives
Not be purer and stronger thereby.

—Meredith.

*Class Problems*

1. Tell how Elisha was called to be a prophet.
2. Contrast the characters of Elijah and Elisha.
3. Which of these two prophets do you admire the more? Why?
4. How did Elisha come to visit at the Shunammite's home?
5. What was done to entertain the prophet?
6. What answer did the woman make to Elisha's offer to speak to the king? Discuss.
7. Give a description of the child's death.
8. How did the woman get to Elisha, and what did she say to him?
9. How was the child restored?
10. What may be learned from this lesson?

V O.K.
Read Prayer.

## Lesson 56

# NAAMAN, THE LEPER

Lesson Text: 2 Kings 5:1-19.

Song; Student Reading: 2 Kings 5:1-3; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 2 Kings 5:14.

Concert Prayer: Our loving Father, we thank thee for the commonplace, for the little things in life that often bring to us our richest blessings. May we not despise the words of love spoken by the least member in our household, for they may lead us to the prophet of God; and the muddy waters of the Jordan may be to us a healing balm in the day of our affliction. Help us to realize that thy free gifts of joy, health, friendship, and the companionship of God are knocking at the door every day for entrance into our lives. Incline our hearts to bid them welcome. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text*: *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.—Rev.* 3:20.

Explain: 1 The Lord * * * Syria. A leper. 2 By companies. 5 The king of Israel. Ten talents. Pieces of gold. Changes of raiment. 6 That thou mayest recover. 10 Sent a messenger. Seven times. 11 Strike. 12 Abana and Pharpar. 13 My father. 15 He returned. A blessing. 17 Two mules' burden of earth? 18 Rimmon. 19 Go in peace.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Pride Humbled*

It was customary in the days of Elisha for the Syrians to make forays into Israel and carry off plunder and captives before they could be pursued. In one of these raids they seized a little Hebrew girl and sold her as a slave to Naaman, the captain of the king's host. Naaman was a great man with his master. He was honorable and a mighty man of valor. But unfortunately he was a leper, and leprosy was one of the most dreadful diseases of those days. It was considered incurable, and meant a slow, lingering death.

It is evident that the great captain had won the affection of the little slave girl, for she said to his wife: "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." The Old Testament says so little about children that we may be pardoned if we pause for a moment to discuss the act of this nameless

child heroine. She seems to have harbored no grudge against her captors who had sold her to strangers. She returned good for evil. Not content merely to do the work assigned her, she manifested an interest in the personal welfare of her master. This girl had the real missionary spirit. She was a pioneer in bringing a knowledge of the true God to foreign lands. Her example should inspire everyone to bring to the attention of others the healing power of Christ. Freely we have received and freely we should give to others the good news of the kingdom of God. If this poor slave child could find an opportunity to say a good word for the power of God and his prophet, what could we not do for him, with all our social contacts? Every day there are openings for us to say a good word that may be the means of saving someone else.

The words of the girl were brought to the ears of the king, and he was struck with the suggestion. He determined to send a letter and a splendid royal gift to the king of Israel, with the request that he command such help as was necessary to heal Naaman. Nothing was said in the letter about the man of God, and the king thought that it was a pretext for a quarrel. He angrily exclaimed that he was not God to kill and to make alive. It never occurred to him that Elisha might help him to solve the problem.

But the prophet heard of the object of Naaman's visit, and took matters into his own hands. He told the king to send the Syrian captain to him. In response to this request, Naaman came to Elisha's humble home, with his horses and chariots and servants, in all the splendor of a great ambassador. Of course, he expected a royal reception. But Elisha did not even pay him the courtesy of coming out to meet him. He simply sent his servant to the great man with the message, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean."

Such an insult! Naaman was accustomed to the homage of all the Syrian people and was enraged at such treatment.

Why was he not received as a man of honor and distinction? Why come all this distance to wash in the muddy Jordan when the clear rivers of his own land were at his service? Naaman was disgusted at such a commonplace prescription for the healing of his leprosy. A disease so deadly required heroic treatment. No simple dipping in water would effect a cure, and the Syrian chief started for home in a great rage.

We blame Naaman for his outburst of anger, but we too dislike the commonplace. Men like the spectacular in life; they clamor for display and striking demonstrations of power. Jesus himself had to meet criticism on this account: "Is not this the carpenter's son? Do we not know his brothers?" It was with such words that the Pharisees sought to discredit the Son of God. His advent was too commonplace to suit them.

This is a dangerous attitude. For the commonplace is the very essence of life. It is the material out of which our days are made. Then, too, the commonplace is God's preparation for bigger things in life. Simple obedience to a command of God is the only path by which we can reach the heights of greatness. Christ's whole teaching was based upon the commonplace. The least in his kingdom was the greatest.

Elisha meant no discourtesy, but Naaman was a proud man, and it was necessary for him to learn the lesson of humility. He had been accustomed to receive deference and respect from everyone. Now he must be made to realize that in God's sight he had no occasion to be proud. He was only a poor frail mortal in the grip of a deadly disease that was slowly eating his life away. This was what the prophet wanted him to see. Elisha wanted no honor himself. He was willing to be effaced from the picture completely, if only he could magnify the power of the God of Israel in the eyes of this haughty Syrian.

Had it not been for the affection and good judgment of his servants, Naaman would have returned home with-

out being healed. But they said to him: "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" Could any advice have been more sensible? Naaman was wise enough to adopt it. He went down and washed in the Jordan river as Elisha had said, and the miracle happened, "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

There was no more standing on his dignity after that. With joy and gratitude he returned to the man of God and asked for admittance into his presence. Humbly he made his confession: "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing [i. e., a present] of thy servant." That was the lesson that Elisha wanted him to learn, but he refused to receive any payment. He was no Baalim, accepting rewards for what God had done. Naaman must learn that the God of all the earth was a God of love, and that his prophets did not divine for money.

It was a wonderful revelation to the Syrian, and he was deeply impressed. His conception of God had always been that his favors could be purchased with money, but here was a man who had been instrumental in curing his loathsome disease, refusing to take a reward. Such self-denial, such disinterestedness was new to him, and he resolved to become a worshiper of the God of Israel. Henceforth he would offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice to other gods, "but unto the Lord." He asked permission to receive two mules' burden of earth wherewith to build an altar to the God of Israel in Syria. His idea seems to have been that Jehovah was a local deity and could only be worshiped on his own soil.

Elisha not only granted this favor, but also permitted him to continue to pay outward homage to Rimmon, the god worshiped by the king of Syria. This permission must not be misunderstood, however. For a man who had

been an idolater all his days, it might be extremely difficult suddenly to abandon every tradition and custom of his life, and for that reason Elisha was lenient. But for us, in the light of Christ's teachings, there can be no compromise with sin. We must not "bow down to Rimmon," but stand for the ideals of our faith before men everywhere, that God's name may be glorified in all the earth.

*Open the Door*

Open the door of your hearts, my lads,
  To the angel of love and truth;
When the world is full of unnumbered joys
  In the beautiful dawn of youth.
Casting aside all things that mar,
  Saying to wrong, depart!
To the voices of hope that are calling you
  Open the door of your heart.

—E. E. Hale.

*Class Problems*

1. Tell all you can about the Syrians.
2. Describe Naaman. Tell about his affliction.
3. Give an account of the captive maid.
4. What kind of a reception did Naaman receive from the king of Israel? Why?
5. Give an account of his visit to Elisha.
6. Why did Naaman refuse to wash in the Jordan? How did he come to change his mind?
7. Give examples of people's dislike for the "commonplace." Why is this attitude wrong?
8. What did Naaman do after he was healed?
9. What great lesson did Elisha teach him?
10. Why did he ask to take soil from Israel to his own land?
11. What compromise did Elisha permit him to make? Was this justified? Why?
12. Discuss the question of compromising with sin.

✓ O.K.

## Lesson 57

# GEHAZI, THE HYPOCRITE

Lesson Text: 2 Kings 4:12-14, 25-31; 5:20-27.

Song; Student Reading: 2 Kings 5:22-23; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 2 Kings 5:26.

Concert Prayer: O thou God of truth who cannot lie, save us from the sin of hypocrisy. May we not only honor thee with our lips, but with all our hearts. Help us to remember the condemnation expressed by Jesus of those who gave their alms to be seen of men, and those who used vain repetitions in their prayers that they might be heard for their much speaking. We desire to worship thee in sincerity and in truth, that blessings may come to us instead of cursing. For this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.—Matt. 23:28.*

Explain: 22 Mount Ephraim. 23 Be content. 24 The tower. 26 Is it a time?

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Thou Shalt Not Covet*

We give a lesson to the study of Gehazi, not because so much is written about him, but because he represents a type of sinner that is all too common. He could not have been altogether bad, and always bad, or Elisha would not have selected him to be his servant. There must have been a time when his possibilities for good were in the ascendent. Like Judas, whom Christ selected to be one of his apostles, he allowed a strain of covetousness in his character to become a besetting sin, and ruin all his prospects of becoming a prophet of God.

The strange part of his sad story is that he deteriorated by daily contact with a man like Elisha. We would naturally think that intimate association with a prophet would have eliminated the bad in him and transformed him into the likeness of his master. But it had the very opposite effect. The tragedy of his life was that he was ruined by familiarity with things that were sacred. He had a great example before him in the person of Elisha but wholly

missed its meaning. He never appreciated his great opportunity. One writer has said of him: "He dwelt with a hero yet was a poltroon; he lived with a saint yet was a knave; he was the associate of a prophet yet was a petty thief."

In the story of the Shunammite woman he appears as worldly wise, but lacking in spirituality. He saw more clearly what the woman longed for most than her master did. In the sequel when the woman bereft of her child came in haste to Carmel and threw herself at Elisha's feet in an agony of grief, Gehazi was shocked at the liberty taken by the woman. He showed an utter lack of sympathy with her overwhelming grief, and would have rudely thrust her aside had not the prophet intervened in her behalf with the statement: "Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her." When her grief was revealed and Gehazi was sent to restore the child, he carried out his master's instruction to the letter but failed to bring life back to the child. Elisha's sacred staff was only a common stick in his hands, because of his lack of sympathy and faith.

But it is in the story of Naaman where Gehazi appears at his worst. The prophet refused to take any money, though the Syrian captain pressed him to do so. Elisha wanted his eyes fixed on God as the only one who was responsible for his healing, and all his gratitude must go to him. His new health had come from God, and money could not purchase such a gift. It was a great lesson, and Naaman was converted. He solemnly renounced his heathen god, and declared that henceforth he would worship the God of Israel.

Then it was that the mean cupidity of Gehazi did its utmost to nullify the good example of his master. He had listened to Elisha's refusal with amazement. How could the prophet let such an opportunity pass without making the most of it? Naaman was rich; he had received a priceless blessing, and it would be a pleasure for him to return

some acknowledgment, which he would never miss. In fact, he had seemed hurt by Elisha's refusal. There certainly could be no harm in taking what he was so anxious to give. And to what excellent uses the money could be put! So pleaded the covetous spirit within the man. By such specious delusions he fostered his evil temptation, until it took shape in a wicked resolve.

The mischief of Elisha's foolish refusal had been done, but he could speedily undo it and no one would be the worse. "Behold," he said, "my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought; but as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him."

Poor Gehazi! what a shipwreck he was making of his life! Surrounded by the most sacred influences that he might choose the good and live, he deliberately turned his back on God and his prophet. How blind some men are! How cheaply they sell their souls! This man had the rare opportunity of living with God's witness to that age. He ate with him, slept with him, and listened to his daily conversation. He heard him testify of God's love in healing Naaman. Was ever a man more highly favored? And now he dared to question his master's judgment. Worse still, for a paltry talent of silver and a garment, he dared to undo the work of his master in converting Naaman to the religion of Israel. Could anything be more wicked? What must the Syrian captain have thought when Gehazi in his master's name asked him for the very thing he had refused? The request for money and garments undid the effects of the fine impression that Elisha had made. It was a disenchantment from the high ideal exhibited by his former refusal. Of course the request was granted, but Naaman could not be blamed if he returned home a little less enthusiastic about worshiping Jehovah than he was before the servant made his request.

"Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" This was the question

that greeted him when he once more stood in the presence of Elisha. The words must have startled him, but he was ready with another lie. "Thy servant went no whither," he replied. And we may be sure that he looked innocent enough. Then, like the crash of doom, there came from the lips of the prophet a reproof so scathing and a punishment so terrible that our hearts almost stop beating as we read: "Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? *Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments? * * * The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed forever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.*"

These dreadful words grip us with an intensity that is hard to express. What a lesson they convey! Contrast the man who stands there now without hope for himself or for his posterity, with what he might have been, and with what he was intended to be. He was in line for leadership among the prophets, the successor of Elisha, a man of God. And now there is nothing left for him but to go back and look upon his silk and his silver for which he exchanged heaven and the happiness of himself and children forever. Could there be a greater tragedy?

*Thou shalt not covet,* thundered the voice of God from Sinai, and we have seen in these lessons how terrible has been the punishment of those who broke this commandment. In the list we can count Baalim, Achan, Abimelech, Saul, David, Absalom, Ahab, Gehazi, and others of lesser note. It must be apparent to all who study the lives of these men that covetousness is one of the most deadly sins in the entire decalogue. It leads to hypocrisy and double dealing, makes good men bad, and is to the soul what leprosy is to the body.

There are in every community men who make religion a cloak for their own avarice. Gehazi used his friendship with the man of God to further his selfish interests. He pre-

tended to be religious, when as a matter of fact his heart had never been touched by its holy flame. Compliance with outward forms of worship may have little meaning. Cain planned the murder of his brother Abel while in the act of offering sacrifice to God. As has been aptly said, "Man may pray in Church on Sunday and prey on their brethren during the week." Daily fellowship with Elisha is a dangerous thing, as well as a blessed privilege; for it may either breed contempt or transform us into the likeness of the prophet.

---

*Hypocrisy*

Neither man nor angel can discern hypocrisy.
It is the only evil that walks invisible
Except to God alone, upon the earth.

—Milton.

*Growth of Sin*

We are not worst at once; the course of evil
Begins so slowly, and from such slight source,
An infant's hand might stem the breach with clay;
But let the stream grow wider, and philosophy,
Age, and religion too, may strive in vain
To stem the headstrong current.

—Author Unknown.

*Class Problems*

1. Why was Gehazi's fall so tragic?
2. Do you think that he was bad at first? Why?
3. How do you account for the fact that he grew bad in the company of Elisha?
4. What part did Gehazi play in the story of the Shunammite woman?
5. How did Elisha's refusal to accept a gift from Naaman affect Gehazi? Why?

6. How did he come to the decision to follow Naaman?
7. Relate their conversation.
8. What happened when he returned to Elisha?
9. What is the message of this lesson to us?

-V O.K

## Lesson 58

# ELISHA, THE SEER

Lesson Text: 2 Kings 6:8-23.

Song; Student Reading: 2 Kings 6:13-16; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 2 Kings 6:16.

Concert Prayer: Gracious God, our hearts are set on thee, and with our lips we honor thy sacred name. Wilt thou touch our eyes that we may see the invisible as did thy ancient seer. We thank thee for our daily contact with thy word, and the great man whom thou didst call to reveal thy glorious personality to ancient Israel. May they be to us also a fountain of light and life and truth. And the glory and honor we give to thee. Amen.

*Memory Text: While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.—2 Cor.* 4:18.

Explain: 8 The king of Syria. 13 Dothan. 17 Round about Elisha. 18 When they came down. 22 Wouldst thou smite? etc.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Seeing the Invisible*

It is interesting to come back to a place that we visited a thousand years before. That is what we are doing today. Dothan, twelve miles north of the city of Samaria, is the place where Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelites by his brethren. In this lesson it is the town where the Syrians surrounded Elisha, to capture and take him to their king.

During the days of Elisha the Syrians carried on a constant warfare against Israel. It consisted mostly of predatory incursions that made life and property very unsafe. In these difficulties the king of Israel was greatly helped by the prophet's counsel. He repeatedly frustrated the designs of the enemy by revealing to his own king the places that the Syrians intended to attack, and in that way defeating the measures of the enemy. Even the king's own life was saved by Elisha's timely warning.

The Syrian ruler, annoyed at his repeated failures, suspected treachery. He called his officers together in great indignation and demanded to know who was the traitor

among them. They assured him that everyone was faithful and that his secrets were made known to the king of Israel by Elisha. The king thereupon decided to capture the prophet, and sent a contingent of horses and chariots at night to surround Dothan, where he was living, and prevent any escape from the gates. It seems never to have occurred to the king of Syria that if Elisha knew his designs against his own king, he would also know his plans against himself.

When Elisha's servant rose in the morning, he was terrified to see the Syrians encamped around the entire city. In great dismay he cried to the prophet, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" Elisha showed no concern. "Fear not," he said, "for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." Then he prayed for the fearful servant, and the youth's eyes were opened and he saw a vision of forces hitherto unseen. We read: "And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

This incident is one of the most comforting in the Old Testament. The natural alarm of the young servant was not shared by Elisha, for his eyes were open. He could see the Unseen—the reality of divine protection. He had no doubt read the words of the Psalmist until he saw the picture: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." Our eyes are blinded by worldliness and lack of faith. But it is within the power of everyone to see the *Unseen*. Two simple words are the keys that unlock the door of the temporal and reveal to us the *Invisible*. They open our eyes to see the soul of God. Pray and obey, so simple and yet so profound. Most of us do neither, and hence are blind to the glorious vision that Elisha saw. For prayer is more than a stereotyped repetition of words spoken on our knees to God; and obeying is not simply outward conformity to certain rules and requirements of our church. Prayer is the heartfelt expression

of a crying need which we feel for God's help and comfort; it is voicing gratitude to him whose love we sense and whose fellowship we desire. And obedience is loyalty of mind and heart and soul to all that God requires in service, praise and worship.

And what will this vision beautiful do for us? First, it will do for us what it did for the servant of Elisha, deliver us from fear. Imagine the reaction that must have come to this young man when he saw the horses and chariots of fire around Elisha. The enemy were still there, but they gave him no further concern. Fear is written on the faces of nearly every person we meet. Fear of danger, fear of poverty, fear of sickness, fear of death, and a hundred other fears, make cowards of us all. It is the greatest enemy of mankind. Nearly all our failures are due to fear. If fear could be taken from the world, the efficiency of every person would be increased one hundred percent. And when we realize that there is no need of it, that it is only a material force that can be overcome by cultivating fellowship with the Unseen, we wonder that it has not long since been banished from the world. "Fear not," said Elisha; and that statement should constantly ring in the ears of every person who hopes to attain success in life.

But seeing the Invisible does more for us than destroying fear. It brings to us a joy greater than any joy that the material world can give. This was the joy which Jesus had in such rich measure, and which he prayed might remain with his disciples. It is the abundant life, the peace that passeth understanding, the companionship of God himself.

We must not get the impression, however, that men who see the Invisible will constantly be shielded from the triumph of enemies or be free from anguish, suffering and defeat. Their victory may not always be a phyiscal victory. Men of God by the thousands have given their lives for the truth. Saints have died in exile and prison, have been

stoned, tempted, slain with the sword, tortured on the rack, rotted in miry dungeons, and sighed out their souls in agonizing flame. Even Christ was scourged and crucified. But through all these tortures and afflictions, God was at their side. The sense of his protection did not desert them, even when to the eyes of men they seemed to be utterly forsaken.

The presence of those horses and chariots of fire, unseen with the natural eye, means not always protection from suffering and death, but they do mean absence of fear and a fulness of joy. They mean also that as long as a man of God is in the line of his duty, and until that duty has been done, no harm can come to him. God will keep him and give his angels charge over him, lest at any time he dash his foot against a stone. It stands to reason that until such a man has completed his work, God will not permit any force or combination of forces to hinder the accomplishment of the work entrusted to him.

And now after this digression we come back to Dothan, and Elisha, and the Syrians surrounding the city. It is interesting to note how easily the prophet extricated himself from his apparent danger. He seems to have gone out of town and down the hill to the Syrian captains. And he prayed that God would send them illusions so that they might be misled. Then he boldly said to them: "This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek." They followed him without question, and he actually led them twelve miles south straight into the city of Samaria, where they suddenly found themselves surrounded by the king's troops. Jehoram eagerly exclaimed: "My father, shall I smite them? Shall I smite them?"

The question was natural enough. Syria had been giving the king no end of trouble, and now that all these men were in his power he might, by putting them to death, break the morale of the Syrian army. But the spirit of

Elisha was more merciful. He told the king that he must not kill but feed them. This action on the prophet's part reminds us of him who said, Love your enemies; forgive them that hate you. When they were well fed, Elisha sent them back to their own camp; and the narrative ends by telling us that this example of mercy and generosity made such a favorable impression that "the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel."

---

*The Great Guest Comes*

His eyes peered out, intent and afar,
And looking beyond the things that are.
He walked as one who is done with fear,
Knowing at last that God was near.
Only the half of him cobbled with shoes,
The rest was away for the heavenly news.

—Edwin Markham.

*Class Problems*

1. Tell all you can about Dothan.
2. Why did the king of Syria seek to capture Elisha?
3. What did the servant see in the morning as he arose? What did he say?
4. What was the prophet's answer?
5. What is meant by seeing the Invisible?
6. How may this gift be realized? Discuss.
7. What two things will it do for us? Discuss.
8. Do you think that the Syrians were smitten with total blindness, or only failed to recognize Elisha? Why?
9. What happened after the Syrians were taken to Samaria?
10. What effect did Elisha's treatment of the Syrians have?

## Lesson 59

# JEHU, THE REVOLUTIONIST

(Date 842 B. C.)

Lesson Text: 2 Kings 9.

Song; Student Reading: 2 Kings 9:1-3; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Exodus 20:4.

Concert Prayer: Father of mercy and love, help us to understand thy hatred of sin, and may we learn to hate it also. We are grateful for the words of warning that have come to us against stubbornness and wilful disobedience of thy divine laws. May we take to heart the great truth announced again and again by thy prophets, that the wages of sin is death. O Father, deliver us from evil; keep our feet in the path of righteousness. For thy name's sake. Amen.

*Memory Text: For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.—Romans 6:23.*

Explain: 1 Box. Ramoth-Gilead. 9 Like house of Jeroboam * * and Baasha. 11 This mad fellow. Ye know the man. 13 Put it under him. On the top of the stairs. 17 Is it peace? 18 Turn thee behind me. 22 Whoredoms. 23 Turned his hands. 26 The blood of his sons. 27 The garden house. 30 Painted her face. 31 Had Zimri peace? etc. 34 A king's daughter. 35 They found no more.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *A Man of Action*

Two dynasties have already come to a tragic end in the northern kingdom of Israel, and in this lesson a third is recorded. It will be remembered that Elijah had foretold the destruction of Ahab's house, for the cruel murder of Naboth and his sons, and the idolatry which he fostered. The king, however, humbled himself before the Lord and was forgiven to the extent of being permitted to rule during his lifetime. Sometime after the prophet's prediction he was killed in a battle with the Syrians and his son Ahaziah succeeded him. His reign only lasted two years when he, too, met a violent death. Jehoram, another son of Ahab and Jezebel, now became king. Both of these sons were fully as bad as their father and mother and practised all the abominations of Baal worship. God withheld the punish-

ment to give them an opportunity to repent, but they failed to take advantage of it.

The school of the prophets under the direction of Elisha did all they could to counteract the example of the king and his court, and with some success, but it was evident that little headway could be made until there was a change of rulers. Jehu, a prominent officer in the king's army, had been designated by the Lord as the man who was to succeed to the throne, and Elijah was commissioned to anoint him king. For some reason he failed to do so. The time now seemed ripe, however, for the fulfilment of Elijah's prediction.

King Jehoram, with the aid of his nephew the king of Judah, had taken Ramoth-Gilead from Syria, and had left the army under Jehu and other officers to hold the city while he and his kinsman king idled their time away at Jezreel. Elisha saw and seized his opportunity to overthrow the house of Ahab. Suddenly he called to him a young man, one of the sons of the prophets, placed a vial of oil in his hands and told him to speed with all haste to Ramoth-Gilead and anoint Jehu king, and commission him to destroy the house of Ahab, and Baal worship throughout Israel.

It was a dangerous thing to do. The dynasty of Ahab was entrenched in power and his life might easily be forfeited for his temerity. But he did not hesitate a moment. He had learned the lesson of going where he was sent, and was off like the wind. It was thirty miles to Ramoth-Gilead, but he ran all the way, and burst into the council of astonished warriors with the startling statement: "I have an errand to thee, O captain. And Jehu said, Unto which of all us? And he said, To thee, O captain."

Jehu arose and followed the youth, who led him into a secret recess of the house, and emptying the oil on his head, said, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord, even over

Israel. And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel."

One moment was sufficient for him to perform his daring deed and deliver his burning message, and the next he had flung open the door and fled. Jehu was taken completely by surprise. While there was general dissatisfaction with the present ruler, it had never occurred to any to rebel against him. True, Jehu had heard Elijah's prophecy when he met Ahab and the two officers of Naboth's vineyard, but had given it little thought at the time. Now it all came back to him. Could it be possible his hand was to be the instrument of doom?

He was not sure how his fellow officers would take it, so he proceeded carefully. He would say nothing until he was sure of his ground, for it might be only a plot of some secret enemy. But his companions were burning with curiosity. They knew that something of great importance had happened. "Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee?" they asked. "You know all about it," Jehu replied with apparent indifference. "Ye know the man, and his communication." "It is false," they cried, "tell us now."

Jehu could see that they suspected what it was; conspiracy began to appear in their faces. It was evident that they were on fire to follow his leadership. Then he told them frankly the perilous secret. Word by word he repeated what the prophet had said, and emphasized the words: "Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel."

A shout of approval greeted the announcement. It was evident that the reigning house had completely forfeited the respect of the army. Every one remembered the murder of Naboth, and held it against the son of Ahab. Then, too, the continued influence of Jezebel added to the discontent. So the captains sprang to their feet, seized Jehu and carried him in triumph to the top of the stairs. Then they blew

a sudden blast of the ram's horn and shouted, "Jehu is king." It was all done so quickly that there was no time for deliberation.

But the die was cast, and Jehu accepted the responsibility. His quick decision made the revolution a success. Had he hesitated a moment it might have failed. We cannot help but admire such a man. There are moments in every life that are critical, when a "yes" or a "no" may determine the destiny not only of an individual life, but sometimes of a nation.

Everything now depended upon the suddenness and fury with which the blow was delivered; and Jehu acted with such promptness that it takes our breath. The ninth and tenth chapters of 2 Kings are unsurpassed in the Old Testament for graphic power of narration. It is a dreadful story of murderous progress. One horror of bloodshed follows another until we gasp with amazement. The kings of Israel and of Judah were first killed. Next came Jezebel, unyielding and defiant to the last. She had witnessed the death of her son and grandson, and knew that her own was imminent. But if she was to die, she would meet death like a queen should. She painted her eyelashes and eyebrows to make her eyes look large and lustrous. Then she put on her jeweled head-dress, and mounted the tower of her beautiful palace in Jezreel. Looking down through the lattice, Jezebel watched the thundering advance of Jehu's chariot. She did not wait for him to speak, but hurled at him the bitterest insult she could devise. The sense of it was: "There is no peace for thee nor thine, any more than for me and mine! Thou mayest murder us; but thou, too, thy doom awaiteth." Brave words, spoken in the face of death, and they stung Jehu to immediate action. "Who is on my side?" he called to her attendants. One or two immediately thrust heads out of the window. "Throw her down!" shouted the relentless Jehu. Without a moment's hesitation they flung the wretched queen to the

ground and her blood spurted on the wall and on the horses. Jehu stopped but a moment, and then drove his horses over her corpse, and entered the city, his wheels red with blood. Later when he sent men to bury her, only the skull was left. She had been eaten by dogs.

After this every member of the house of Ahab, and the whole assembly of Baal worshipers were ruthlessly slain. Jehu bitterly waded in blood to the throne. But we must not judge him too harshly. He had been commanded to exterminate the house of Ahab, and utterly destroy Baal worship from the land of Israel. It was a savage time and Jehu could see no other way of securing his throne and restoring the worship of Jehovah. He succeeded in what he undertook, and the author of the book of 2 Kings wholly approved all that he did.

To us his course was utterly wrong and inexcusable. But as has been said before, we must judge Bible characters by their environment and the times in which they lived. Jehu was a man of energy. He put his whole heart into what he did. It is simply amazing how promptly he acted and how thoroughly he carried out the commission assigned him.

What he did would be wrong today, but the way he did it is the right way to do our work. Thousands fail because of indifference. They loaf on the job. Too many people drift. They lack energy, purpose, will. The zeal of Jehu was most commendable. He had his work finished before people woke up to the fact that he was doing it. That is why he became a king.

---

*Action*

Lose this day loitering, 'twill be the same story
Tomorrow, and the rest more dilatory;
Thus indecision brings its own delay,
And days are lost lamenting over days.

Are you in earnest? Seize this very moment;
What you can do, or dream you can, begin it;
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it;
Only engage, and then the mind grows heated;
Begin, and then the work will be completed.

—Author Unknown.

*Class Problems*

1. What prophecy did Elijah make concerning the house of Ahab? Why?
2. What was the character of his sons?
3. What part did Elisha play in bringing about the revolution?
4. Give an account of the anointing of Jehu.
5. Discuss the character of Jehu.
6. How can we justify his actions?
7. Give a character sketch of Jezebel.
8. What is meant by the statement, "The wages of sin is death?" Illustrate it.
9. What may we learn from this lesson?

## Lesson 60

# AMOS, THE HERDSMAN PROPHET

Lesson Text: Amos 1:1; 2:11-12; 3; 4:1-3; 5:21-25; 6:4-6.
Song; Student Reading: Amos 5:21-24; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Amos 5:15.

Concert Prayer: Father in heaven, we thank thee for the humble herdsman prophet who saw the social wrongs in Israel and boldly came forth to speak thy word, and we glory in his strength and courage. We too live in a day of inequality and human suffering. Let us like him be strong and fearless in bearing witness that thou art a God of righteousness and justice. Make us thy champions in proclaiming the brotherhood of man. May we not falter or be dismayed because of our weakness, but glad and unafraid because thou art strong. Amen.

*Memory Text: I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.—Isaiah 6:8.*

Explain: 1:1 Amos. 2:11 Nazarites. 3:3 Be agreed? 5 Shall one take up a snare from the earth? etc. 7 His secret. 9 In the palaces. The mountains of Samaria. 14 Bethel. The horns. 15 Winter house with the summer house. The houses of ivory. 4:1 Kine. Masters. 2 Your posterity. 5:21 I will not smell. 22 Meat offerings. Peace offerings. 25 Have ye offered?

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *A Voice of Warning*

While Jehu was successful in destroying the house of Ahab and Baal worship in Israel, his revolution left the country so weak that it was nearly overthrown by outside enemies. The Syrians plundered the kingdom from one end to the other. Samaria was besieged, and so great was the hunger of the people that parents devoured their own children. During the reign of Jehu's son the kingdom reached its lowest ebb, and would have been completely destroyed had not other enemies threatened the Syrians. They had to withdraw their forces from the south to protect their own kingdom from a northern invasion. This left Israel free to regain their independence. Finally under Jeroboam II, the great-grandson of Jehu, Israel attained its greatest extent of territory. All surrounding nations in-

cluding Judah paid tribute, and its wealth and prestige had never been so great as during that glorious period.

The victories and success of Jeroboam's reign were all the more impressive when contrasted with the defeats and misfortunes of the kings who preceded him. All despondency was gone and the people began to dream of a world-wide empire. Baalism had never recovered from the shock of Jehu's ruthless attack, and had now disappeared. Both priests and people were careful to observe the feasts and sacrifices of the Mosaic Law, while Bethel became a great religious sanctuary and was constantly thronged with worshipers.

But unseen dangers confronted the nation. Self-righteousness and prosperity were greater dangers than adversity. The rulers became blind to social wrongs. Corruption of justice was a common sin. The rich oppressed the poor, and a spirit of greed ruled all classes. Women were as bad as the men and urged their husbands to prey upon the weak, that their selfish indulgences might be gratified. Along with this, there went flagrant sexual immoralities and a general decay of decency.

Twenty miles ~~north~~ south of Bethel in the kingdom of Judah was the village of Tekoa. A more uninviting place could not have been found in all Palestine. It consisted of a few low one-roomed houses with mud floors. The windows had no panes but were simply openings with wooden bars for protection, and the flat roofs were covered with dirt. No kind of shelter could have been simpler or more primitive. The town was shut in by gray limestone hills on the north and west. To the east was a barren wilderness extending to the Dead Sea, and to the south was a stony plain as far as the eye could see.

In this forbidding place lived a peasant by the name of Amos, caring for a few sheep and sycamore trees. The fruit of this tree was ground for flour, out of which a coarse bread was made. Life under such conditions was a

©Underwood & Underwood

TEKOA, THE HOME OF AMOS

This is a place of visions. The horizons are far away, the monotonous landscape furnishes no object for the attention, except as the temporary tents of the Bedouins may lead one to think of the problems of life. Beyond the horizon to the east and the south is the waiting desert, whence come the prostrating winds of Jehovah's judgment. In the deep chasm to the east is the Plain of Jordan, haunted by the sinister memories of Sodom and Gomorrah. Among the silences of this watch tower the prophet heard the voice of Jehovah announcing doom on recreant Israel.

struggle with inclement nature and wild beasts. There were no printed books in those days, but all Hebrew boys were taught the history of their own people, and learned something about the surrounding nations as well, in view of the fact that Israel had become a commercial nation. Through it passed the highways of the world. Travelers visited all parts of the country and left stores of knowledge wherever they went. From this and other sources, Amos obtained a great deal of information. When travelers from the city came his way, he was always ready to engage in conversation. He left his sheep and trees, and leaning over the stone wall that enclosed his small farm he listened to reports from Jerusalem, Bethel and Samaria. Things were not going well. The rich were grinding the life out of the poor, and the priests were selling their souls to the ruling classes. After listening to such complaints, he would go back to his work and think about it.

Bethel was a market for Amos's products, and when he went there he made observations for himself. The reports that he had heard were all too true, only the half had not been told. He listened to their boastings and predictions of the coming glory of Israel; how the nation was to subdue all other kingdoms and rule the world. He saw the hypocrisy of their religion, and the rottenness in society. The thing got on his conscience; he could neither eat nor sleep. Israel, God's chosen people, would surely perish unless they could be made to see the dangers that threatened them. But who could open the eyes of a people blinded by prosperity and self-righteousness? Amos went to God about it, and God confirmed his worst fears. Israel was headed for destruction, unless they speedily repented. Because Amos was the only one who could see it, God told him to go and make the proclamation of the kingdom's downfall.

No prophet ever faced greater odds than Amos when he appeared at Bethel to deliver his message. Imagine the

situation! The people were universally religious and offered their sacrifices and burnt offerings as they had been commanded. No Elijah could come and accuse them of idolatry. They were strictly observing the Law of Moses, and in return the Lord was giving them such prosperity as had not been known since the days of Solomon. It is hard to argue against existing facts, but that is what Amos had to do.

Let us reconstruct the scene if we can. There is Bethel, the royal religious sanctuary of the northern kingdom, hallowed by a thousand memories of the past, from the days of Abraham until now. It is the very spot where God appeared to Jacob and renewed with him the covenant that he had made with Abraham. The occasion is an annual festival when all classes, especially the rich and rulers, are gathered from every part of the country to share their offerings with the Lord, amid shouts of enthusiasm and songs of rejoicing. Smoke from the great altar ascends to heaven as the sacrifices are consumed, and the priests chant the ritual prescribed by the great Lawgiver to Israel in the wilderness. Everyone feels the sense of power and prosperity. God apparently is with his people, and the covenant with Jacob is to be fulfilled.

Suddenly a voice is heard above the voices of priests and worshipers. All eyes are instantly turned to a rude figure clad with a girdle, as was Elijah. His hands and face are brown with the soil and sun. They crowd closer and applaud his statements, for he is pronouncing judgment and woes upon Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and even Judah, all enemies of Israel. Nothing could have suited his listeners better than to learn of the downfall of these hated nations. For a moment Amos is the most popular man in that great concourse of people.

But it was only for a moment. While his hearers were seeing as in a vision the glories of the coming day when the Lord would destroy all their foes and establish their

world-wide dominion, there fell from the lips of the prophet a ringing denunciation of their own sins. The crimes of the rich and ruling class were set forth in burning sentences, as were also the selling of the needy poor into slavery because they could not pay a petty debt; the misuse of authority; immorality, practised in the name of religion; garments taken in pledge and never returned; and disgraceful carousals in the very shadow of the sanctuary. These crimes were much worse than the sins of other nations because they showed base ingratitude to God who had done so much for them. Then he sketched their history from the days of their slavery in Egypt, and called attention to the care which the Lord had had for them. Again and again he had pitied and pardoned them; but now there was nothing for them except the doom of a foreign conquest, that would crush them as a wagon crushes all beneath it. The prophet pronounced their doom: "The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise."

---

### *The Call*

There bust he forth: "All ye, whose hopes rely
On God, with me midst these deserts mourn:
Repent, repent, and from old errors turn."
Who listened to his voice, obeyed his cry?
Only the echoes, which he made relent,
Rung from the marble caves, "Repent, repent!"

—Drummond.

### *Class Problems*

1. Describe the condition of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II.
2. Locate and describe Tekoa.
3. What was the occupation of Amos?
4. What enabled him to see the true condition of

Israel better than the religious priests of his day?

5. Tell all you can about Bethel.
6. Note the illustrations used by Amos to drive home his message: Amos 1:9; 2:13; 3:1-8; 5:18-20; 6:12-14.
7. Note his plea for justice: Amos 3:11; 5:7, 12, 15, 24; 6:3, 6, 12. (Note: The word judgment means justice.)
8. What is the meaning of "Ye kine of Bashan?" (4:1-3.) Have we a similar condition today?

✓ O.K

* placid

LESSON 61

# AMOS, THE PROPHET OF JUSTICE

Lesson Text: Amos 7.

Song; Student Reading: Amos 7:14-15; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Amos 8:11.

Concert Prayer: Eternal Father, into thy hands we commit ourselves afresh. May it be to us a precious day, inspiring us to seek a richer life and higher ideals. Help us to wring from the precious hours new truth and greater faith. May every minute add to our strength and courage. Thou hast a message for our day and generation; make us worthy and brave enough to deliver it. We plead for this in the name of our Savior, who gave his life for us. Amen.

*Memory Text: But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. —Amos* 5:24.

Explain: 1 Grasshoppers. King's mowings. 4 The great deep. A part. 7 Upon a wall. 9 The high places of Isaac. 10 Not able to bear. 12 There eat bread. 13 The king's chapel. 14 Sycamore fruit. 16 Thou sayest. Drop not thy word. 17 A polluted land.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Priest vs. Prophet*

When a man like Amos comes to town, things begin to happen. The enemies of Paul complained that he turned the world upside down, and that was what Amos did. The placid sinners at Bethel had to take notice; deep down in their hearts they knew that he was right, but of course they would not admit it. They tried to answer him by pointing out how strictly they observed the Law of Moses; at that very time they were in Bethel to celebrate a religious festival and offer sacrifices and burnt offerings to the Lord. This ought to be ample evidence that he was pleased with them, and that he would permit no such calamity to happen as Amos had predicted.

What must have been their astonishment and rage to hear his answer. Speaking in the name of the Lord, he said: "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou

away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols."

The effect of such a statement can be imagined. This impudent fellow who dared to discredit their sacrifices and religious ceremonial must be silenced. Even the chief priest of the royal sanctuary at Bethel, Amaziah, now took notice of the prophet. He wrote a letter to king Jeroboam, stating that Amos had conspired against him by prophesying that the king should die by the sword, and that Israel should be taken captive out of their own land.

Evidently the king was not disturbed by what he considered the idle statement of an irresponsible person like Amos, for we have no record of his taking any action. Since Jeroboam would do nothing, Amaziah took matters into his own hands to silence Amos. "O thou seer," he sarcastically exclaimed, "go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: But prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court."

Amos indignantly denied that he was a diviner for money or a professional prophet. He was a herdsman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit. The Lord had taken him from the flock, and called him to prophesy to his people Israel. Then with a boldness that always characterises the true prophet, he said to Amaziah: "Thou sayest, Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Israel. Therefore thus saith the Lord; Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; .....and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land." And then Amos went on to picture in grim detail the fate that should soon overtake not only the proud priest to whom it was addressed, but all the rulers of northern Israel.

Of course, there could be no peace after that, and it is a wonder that he was not put to death before he could escape. But he reached his home in safety, and it was for-

27,000 taken captive by Sargon.



tunate that he did, for there he recorded the prophecies he had made against Israel. There had been many prophets before his time, but Amos was the first to write his warnings and predictions. Impossible as it seemed at the time, about twenty-five years later the very thing happened that Amos had foretold; more than twenty-seven thousand of the ruling classes were taken captive by Sargon, king of Assyria, beyond the Euphrates river and settled at three different points. Here they disappear from history, and have become known as the lost tribes of Israel.

Let us take our imagination with us and visit Tekoa today, or rather, the place where it once stood; for today the spot is uninhabited. It was located ten miles due south of Jerusalem. We can reach it best by taking donkeys from Bethlehem, and traveling about five miles to the southeast over acres of rocks, slipping often over the smooth flat surfaces, until we reach a barren crag strewn on all sides with stone. Here was the ancient town. Around us we see lines of walls which indicate that houses were located there. How interesting it would be if we knew which was the foundation of the house where Amos lived! But no one will ever know. Cisterns are everywhere, dug deep in the rock, to store the water during the rainy season; for none could be obtained when the dry season came. In every direction is a wilderness of rocks, barren hills and wadies. Not even a tree is to be seen, and we wonder what has become of the sycamores that were Amos's special care. But as we look about us, the prophet seems to fit into the place. Many of his passages are illustrated by the objects we see. Here the Lord tread "upon the high places of the earth," and "formeth the mountains, and createth the wind." From this isolated hillcrest he looked into the cloudless sky and learned to know the God "that maketh the Pleiades and Orion." Every illustration in his prophecies is made clear to him who walks the paths trod by his feet, but it is hard to understand how in such an environment he developed his gripping appeal for social righteousness.

And now, since it was the scene of the prophet's ministry, and we shall not visit it again, let us turn to Bethel as it is seen today, ten miles south of Jerusalem. It also has greatly changed, even to its name. The four springs are still there to quench the traveler's thirst, but there is no royal sanctuary, no luxurious homes, no golden bull, no altar, no sacrifices, no priests. Nothing strikes the eyes except rocks, curiously-formed rocks, rising like weird stairs, as they did four thousand years ago when Jacob slept there with a stone for a pillow and dreamed that they reached to heaven, and angels were walking up and down, with God at the top speaking to him. A hundred sacred memories cluster around this spot, not the least of which is the fearless Amos facing Jeroboam's angry priest. It is a sad come-down from the Bethel of that glorious day to the tawdry village of Beitin, the home of four hundred plundering Arabs.

Amos was the mightiest figure of his time, daring not only the idle rich, but king and priest, to deliver his thunderous message against the hypocrisy and social injustice of his day. He scathingly denounced the rich who "sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes." But best of all, he exalted the God of Israel as universal in his rule, holding the destiny of all nations in his keeping, and proclaimed the great truth that he was a God of righteousness, and even his own people Israel must suffer for their iniquities. All their sacrifices, all their ritual and elaboration in worship, were vain so long as they oppressed the poor and crushed the needy. That was a tremendous announcement to come from a poor herdsman in 750 B. C.

Dwight L. Moody, the great Christian evangelist, was once criticised for a mistake in grammar in one of his most inspiring sermons, by a man who prided himself on his correct use of English. "Yes," he replied, "I often make such mistakes. I had very little schooling and never studied English; but the little I have acquired, I have consecrated to God and the salvation of men. I hope that you have done as much with your perfect English." The man had no

more to say, for he gave none of his time or talents to God. Amos gave all that he had, and it turned out to be so much that people still wonder from what source he received the marvelous truths that he announced.

There never was a time when such men were more needed than today. God is calling for men of vision and courage to deliver anew the message of justice and social righteousness. Ten-talented men are generally too busy with their own affairs, but God can do wonders with one-talented men, if they will but dedicate all they have to God.

---

*The Prophet*

And thus, O prophet-bard of old,
Hast thou thy tale of sorrow told!
The same which earth's unwelcome seers
Have felt in all succeeding years.
Sport of the changeful multitude,
Nor calmly heard nor understood,
Their song has seemed a trick of art,
Their warnings but the actor's part.
With bonds, and scorn, and evil will
The world requites its prophets still.

Yet shrink not thou, whoe'er thou art,
For God's great purpose set apart,
Before whose far-discerning eyes,
The Future as the Present lies!
Beyond a narrow-bounded age
Stretches thy prophet-heritage,
Through Heaven's dim spaces angel trod,
Through arches round the throne of God!
Thy audience, worlds!—all Time to be
The witness of the Truth in thee!

—J. G. Whittier.

*Class Problems*

1. Locate and describe Bethel today.
2. Read Amos's statement concerning sacrifices, and make an application of it today.
3. Who was Amaziah? What did he say to Amos?
4. What answer did Amos make?
5. Why did Amos indignantly deny that he was a prophet?
6. What great truths did Amos announce?
7. Who are the priests today? The prophets?
8. What is the message of this lesson to us?

Hosea.

LESSON 62

# HOSEA, THE PROPHET OF LOVE

Lesson Text: Hosea 4:1-9; 5:5; 6:4-6; 7:8-11; 9:9; 11:7-8; 13:2-3.

Song; Student Reading: Hosea 6:1-3; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Hosea 14:9.

Concert Prayer: Our God and Father, may the tragic story of Hosea's undying love for the faithless Gomer be a revelation of thy unbounded and eternal love for us. Such love as thine is wonderful, beyond our power to express or comprehend. But, may we catch the spirit of thy love, and share it with all we meet. Help us, Father, to love thee with all our hearts and with all our souls and with all our might, and our neighbors as ourselves. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I cast thee off, Israel? —Hosea* 11:8.

Explain: 4:1 Controversy. 2 By swearing. Break out. Blood toucheth blood. 4 Thy people. 5 The prophet. Mother. 6 Lack of knowledge. Thy children. 8 They eat up. Set their heart. 9 Like * * * priest. 5:5 The pride * * * face. 6:4 Morning cloud. 5 Hewed * * * slain them. Thy judgments * * * forth. 7:8 Ephraim * * among the people. A cake not turned. 9 Strangers * * * strength. 10 The pride * * * face. 11 A silly dove. 9:9 Gibeah. 11:7 Though * * * him. 8 Admah * * * Zeboim? 13:2 Kiss. Men that sacrifice.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

During the last years of Jeroboam's reign, a native of the northern kingdom by the name of Hosea was passing through a tragic domestic experience. His wife Gomer, to whom he was devotedly attached, deserted him for another lover. This was one of the greatest sins that a woman in Israel could commit. She continued her downward course, until at last she sank so low as to be sold for a slave. But in this terrible degradation Hosea did not abandon her. By divine command he purchased her from bondage and took her to his home again, where he watched over her with the deepest affection and solicitude. His love for his erring wife was like a consuming fire, which no infidelity on her part could quench. With all the power he had, he tried to win back her love for him. Whether she became a good wife again we are not told, but if he failed

it was through no lack of effort on his part. It has been asserted that in all the world's literature there is no record of human love like that of Hosea.

Through this heart-breaking experience he learned what no other prophet has ever learned as fully as he did, that the essence of the Divine nature is love. A statement of that fact means little, unless it is accompanied by a personal experience. We must live and suffer before God can reveal to us his unbounded love. Amos announced in ringing sentences the justice and righteousness of God, but he said nothing of his love. That discovery was reserved for Hosea. Gomer in her purity was a symbol of the Israel that the Lord had led from slavery in Egypt to the land of promise; and she was also a symbol of Israel's present degradation. Hosea's loathing abhorrence of his wife's sin, his intense indignation at her infidelity, was only exceeded by his tender compassion for her in the terrible misery she had brought upon herself.

When the great Jeroboam II died in 740 B. C., his son Zachariah succeeded him, but his reign only lasted six months, when he was killed by an adventurer named Shallum. So ended in blood the house of Jehu. It will be remembered that the wicked Jezebel had made the prediction that as Jehu did to her family, so should it be done to his. Her prophecy was now fulfilled. Shallum was king a month, when he was slain by Menahem. During the next eighteen years disaster followed disaster; one king succeeded another, until there was no stability in the government. Anarchy and disorder prevailed, and it was evident to everyone that the end of the kingdom was at hand. The rich were robbed to pay heavy tribute to Assyria, and there was general discontent among all classes, while all the time wickedness and immorality increased. The nation was steeped in sin and ripe for destruction.

During these sad years, when the glory of Israel had departed, one lone voice was heard in the land. It was the voice of Hosea, proclaiming the love of God for his people,

and calling them to repentance. From his own tragic experience, he knew how hard it was for the Lord to give up the people he loved. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I cast thee off, Israel?" was the message from God which he delivered. Nothing sadder is recorded in history than this final desperate effort of the prophet Hosea to save the nation of Israel from the terrible doom that was just ahead.

In the text quotations of this lesson, Hosea traces step by step the downfall of Israel. (1) It was lack of knowledge. The prophet charged that they were ignorant of God's law; the priests had failed to teach them, and they had no desire to learn what God required.

(2) Pride. Israel tried to rival other nations in power. The prosperity under Jeroboam had proved a snare. It was not their destiny to lead the world in temporal things. God does not measure a nation by its standing armies and conquered provinces. Material success is only good if it ministers to the moral energy, intellectual development and spiritual growth of the people in a nation.

(3) Lack of stability. Their goodness was like the morning cloud, or the dew that vanished away. Worship was formal and lacked spirituality.

(4) Ephraim had mixed with other nations, and their law enjoined them to remain separate. They were like a cake not turned, raw on one side and burned on the other. Some too rich, others too poor; hot in temporal affairs and cold in religion, were the two great extremes.

(5) They had corrupted themselves. Their religion was impure and rotten. God had given them a high ideal of faith, and they had lowered it to the standard of the Canaanite nature-worship, which was unspeakably immoral.

(6) The people were backsliders. This had become a habit. God could place no dependence in them, yet he was still willing to forgive them if they would repent.

(7) They had gone back to idolatry and made molten

images of their silver. Hosea was particularly bitter against this sin. How could Israel forsake the worship of Jehovah for a manufactured god? It seemed incredible that they should persist in practising this terrible sin.

These were the steps of Israel's downfall, and they had brought the nation to the brink of ruin. But there was still hope. God was even now willing to pardon and take them back, if they would repent and turn again to God. "O Israel, return unto Jehovah thy God; for thou hast fallen by thy iniquity. Take with you words, and return unto Jehovah; say unto Jehovah, Take away all iniquity." Israel has one more chance; the love of God may still be their salvation. "Come back," he pleads. "If you only knew how God loves you, you would not hesitate." But they did not know, and could not see their doom, and would not listen to the prophet's plea.

We do not know the place where Hosea lived, but we know that it was in the northern kingdom. He was part of Israel and suffered with Israel. He did not come with a message to his people, but was himself the message of God's redeeming love. What he did for unfaithful Gomer, God would do for apostate Israel. How blind they were! What a tragedy it was that a nation that could produce such men as Elijah, Elisha, Hosea and other prophets, should deliberately spurn God's love, and forsake its mighty destiny! We could weep with Hosea over their blindness.

There are two lessons for us in Israel's tragic story. The first is that inward corruption is more dangerous than outward foes; and the second, that the truest of all patriots is he who identifiies himself with his people, mourns with them in their sorrows as if they were his own, takes upon himself their sins, and suffers with them in their afflictions. Hosea did all this for Israel, and he has come down to us as the highest human expression of God's love in the Old Testament.

A greater contrast than Amos and Hosea cannot be imagined; but the message of either would have been in-

complete without the other. Amos said nothing about repentance, and yet the sole purpose he could have had in delivering his message was to get Israel to repent. He said nothing about love, either his own or God's; but he must have loved the people to whom he ministered, and been convinced also that God loved them. On the other hand, the whole burden of Hosea was a cry of repentance and a declaration of God's love for his chosen people. Whether the two ever met we do not know. It seems likely that Hosea must have heard Amos, but there is no evidence of it in his prophecies. Their methods were entirely different, but their objective was the same, namely, the salvation of northern Israel.

---

*Love*

Love, indeed, is light from heaven;
A spark of that immortal fire,
With angels shared, by Allah given,
To lift from earth our low desire.
Devotion wafts the mind above,
But heaven itself descends in love;
A feeling from the Godhead caught,
To wean from self each sordid thought;
A ray of Him who formed the whole;
A glory circling round the soul!

—Byron.

*Class Problems*

1. What tragic domestic experience did Hosea have?
2. Some have contended that this experience was only a parable. What is your opinion? Why?
3. Name the last six kings of Israel.
4. What was the condition of the country during this period?
5. What was Hosea's message?
6. Contrast Hosea and Amos.

7. What were the steps of Israel's downfall?
8. What lessons may we learn from Hosea? (See also 4:13-19; 4:9; 4:6; 8:1; 5:10.)

Lesson 63 Alwood.

# ISAIAH, THE PATRIOT PROPHET

Lesson Text: Isaiah 6:1-8; 5:1-12.

Song; Student Reading: Isa. 1:2-4; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Isa. 6:8.

Concert Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we feel thy presence here today and thy call upon us for the highest service that men and women can know. But we are weak. Our limitations and handicaps are many. Wilt thou give us strength and pardon our imperfections. Cleanse our lips and purify our hearts. Give unto us a vision of thy glory, and may we hear the cry of "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;" that we may have courage to answer the heavenly call with Isaiah's words, "Here am I; send me." For this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. —Isaiah* 6:8.

Explain: 6:1 In the year. 2 Seraphim. Covered his face. 3 Holy, holy, holy. 4 Foundation shook. 5 Woe is me! Unclean lips. 6 Live coal. 7 Thy sins forgiven. 8 Whom shall I send? 5:2 Tower. 7 Judgment. 8 Place. 10 Bath. 11 That continue all night. 12 Regard not.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Send Me*

One difficulty we shall have in studying the prophets is their remoteness. Nothing is recorded of their everyday lives, and they do not seem like human beings. We read the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and others of that far-off time and feel that they were men like ourselves; but it is not so with the prophets. They are mere shadows beyond our ken, unreal figures far removed from our daily interests. Why should this be so? Isaiah lived more than two thousand years after Abraham, and yet we know far less about him. His everyday life has been withdrawn from common observation. We know nothing of his home life, his daily activities, his likes and dislikes. Among his many admirers, not one took the trouble to reveal his face, or give us a glimpse of his humanity. Perhaps they thought his message would be more effective, if we knew nothing of his personal circumstances. They let us hear his voice, but

hid the man lest we should think him commonplace. And this they did to all the prophets.

It was a great mistake. What would Washington or Lincoln or Franklin mean to this generation, if we had nothing left of them except their written words? We think none the less of them because they had faults like other men. The daily acts of men give color to their message. We admire Isaiah, of course, and are willing to grant that he was the greatest of the prophets; but he does not interest us as he might have done if we knew him better.

We are told a few facts concerning him that should be mentioned. He lived in Jerusalem all his life, and loved that city better than anything else on earth. His life covered the reigns of at least four and perhaps five kings of Judah. He spent at least forty years in the ministry as a preacher, teacher and counselor, not only to the common people, but to kings and nobles. Mention is made of his two sons to whom he gave names that emphasized both his message of doom and of hope for a remnant. While nothing is said directly of his social rank, we infer from his close association with the kings and nobility that he was of noble birth, and we know that he was well educated from his writings. Nothing in the Old Testament is superior to his lofty eloquence and keen insight into and analysis of the great world movements of his day.

Isaiah grew up during the long and prosperous reign of Uzziah, who was one of the most able and energetic kings of Judah. His reign was practically contemporaneous with that of Jeroboam II, king of Israel, and the same evils developed simultaneously in the two kingdoms. When Amaziah the priest at Bethel told Amos to go and prophesy in Judah, he was advising something that was sorely needed. Prosperity was a snare to both countries. But so far as we know, no warning was sounded until the year that king Uzziah died in 740 B. C.

Isaiah, a young man of twenty, was at the temple worship. No doubt the grave problems which resulted from

the king's death were in his mind. Suddenly he saw instead of the symbols of God's presence, the Ark and cherubim, the Lord himself, vast and glorious, dominating the whole temple with his presence, and seraphims one crying to another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is filled with his glory." It was a wonderful spiritual vision of the Lord's true character. In the light of what he saw, his own guilt and the vileness of the nation were made clear. A cry of horror escaped him, and he made quick confession of his sins. Then one of the seraphims placed a live coal on his lips, and he received assurance that his sins had been forgiven and he was morally clean in the sight of God.

Isaiah was transformed into a newness of life. He saw the need of service as he had never seen it before, and when God asked for volunteers he promptly answered: "Here am I; send me." His commission was similar to that of Amos and Hosea; he was to warn his countrymen, as they were warning Israel. The same sins were rampant in both countries, and the same judgment awaited each nation unless there was genuine repentance. Calamity after calamity was to come to Judah, until destruction overtook the nation, and only a small remnant should survive.

It took courage to deliver a message like that, for Judah had the same self-righteous attitude as Israel. The people were blinded by the fatal delusion that nothing could happen to God's people. He would care for his own, no matter what was their conduct. But Isaiah in the glory of his vision had seen the holiness of God, and he knew that unless there was speedy repentance the end of his nation was at hand; and with unbounded energy and unflagging zeal, he set himself to the task of saving Judah. His patriotism was of a character so lofty that he was ready to make any personal sacrifice, even to walk half-naked and barefoot for three years through the cold Judean winters and the blistering, burning heat of the summers, as an illustration of the slavery that awaited his people, unless they changed

the fatal policy they were pursuing. A man must have tremendous convictions before he will suffer and humiliate himself, as Isaiah did to teach his lesson.

Amos taught the righteousness and justice of God; Hosea, his love; and Isaiah proclaimed his holiness and glory. All of them bore witness to his universal dominion over all the nations of the earth. He was omnipotent, and every land and people were subject to his rule and the instruments he used to bring about his purposes. He was King of kings, and beside him there was no other. That was the great contribution which these men made to true religion.

We call attention especially to the fact that each of these men received a great personal religious experience,—Amos as he followed his sheep over the sterile Judean hills, Hosea in the terrible tragedy of his domestic affliction, and Isaiah in the house of God in Jerusalem. Every true witness for God must have a similar experience. No one can sincerely say, "Here am I; send me," unless he has a personal revelation of God. He must know whereof he speaks, or his words will be "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." He must see the holiness of God and the hideousness of sin as Isaiah did, and know that he is forgiven, before he can proclaim God's word to an indifferent world and dare all to deliver his message. We cannot even hear the call for service until our souls are cleansed. Stained youth can do nothing for God. Only Sir Galahad, whose strength was as the strength of ten because his heart was pure, can serve. This is the price we must pay for religious leadership.

Many young people say that they do not care for church. Let them remember that Isaiah found God there. He is always there, waiting for those who come to seek him. What place is so fit to find him as in his own home? In that sacred place the call comes to us as clearly and to the same immortal honors as it did in that far-off day to the young Jerusalem aristocrat. In every generation God needs choice young men and women for service. What a glorious day

it is to work for God! He wants no conscripts. Who, like Isaiah, will answer his call for volunteers, and cry: "Lord, here am I; send me?"

---

### *The Call to Prophethood*

Art thou not prophet nor leader? What then?
Smite! Become prophet! Thus God exalts men,
Smite first, strive first; let us see what avails.
'Tis trying succeeds, 'tis refusal that fails.
Delve down, if thou must, through the flintiest stuff,
So the water spring forth, thou art prophet enough!

—James Buchanan.

### *Class Problems*

1. Name the kings of Judah that were contemporary with Isaiah.
2. Mention the facts that are known of Isaiah.
3. Why do you think so little of his personal life has been recorded?
4. Tell all you can about the reign of Uzziah. What finally happened to him? (2 Chron. 26.)
5. Give an account of Isaiah's call.
6. What effect did his vision produce on Isaiah?
7. What is the true function of a prophet?
8. Discuss this statement: God's call is man's opportunity, not his obligation.
9. Why is religious leadership especially needed today?

LESSON 64 Nylen.

# HEZEKIAH, THE GOOD KING

Lesson Text: 2 Chronicles 30:1-9, 25-27; 2 Kings 20:1-7.

Song; Student Reading: 2 Chron. 30:9; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 2 Kings 20:3.

Concert Prayer: Kind and loving Father, wilt thou plant in our hearts the firm conviction that goodness is more to be desired than greatness. Help us through all the vicissitudes that may come to us in the future years to cherish goodness and leave with the world, when we are gone, the record of a spotless name. We do not seek for riches or honors or fame, but only that we exemplify in our lives thy goodness. Grant that we may follow the example of Jesus who spent his life in doing good, that our lives may become the embodiment of kindness and good will. If there is anything lovely, or of good report, or praiseworthy, may we seek after these thngs. Amen.

*Memory Text: My sons, be not now negligent: for the Lord hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that ye should* minister unto him.—2 *Chron.* 29:11.

Explain: 30:1 Israel and Judah. 2 In the second month. 3 At that time. Sanctified. 5 Beer-sheba * * * Dan. 6 Posts. The remnant. 7 Trespassed. 9 Shall find compassion. 2 Kings 20:1 Thou shalt die. 3 How I have walked. A perfect heart. 4 The middle court. 7 A lump of figs.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Back to God*

As we already know, the kingdom of Israel was divided at the death of Solomon. Our study so far has concerned itself with events and characters in the northern kingdom, or Israel. As has been noted, the capital city Samaria was taken by the Assyrians in 722 B. C., and the leaders of the nation deported into different parts of Assyria, and lost to history. A large part of the people were permitted to remain. These in time amalgamated with foreigners that were transplanted from other conquered nations to the land of Israel. The population, therefore, was not diminished, but rather increased by Sargon's conquest.

In the last lesson we returned to the kingdom of Judah and the holy city of Jerusalem, where Isaiah's ministry began

about 740 B. C. Here a descendant of David still sits on the throne. Since the death of Solomon, twelve men and one woman have ruled the land, and today the thirteenth, Hezekiah, has just been crowned king. There are so many conflicts in the chronology of his reign, that it is difficult to say whether it began before the fall of the northern kingdom or shortly afterwards.

His father Ahaz had nearly wrecked the kingdom by disregarding the advice of Isaiah and selling out to Assyria, and now it was at the mercy of these cruel foes. The spirit of iniquity was rampant in the land. Ahaz had filled Jerusalem with altars to the gods of his enemies, and burned his own son as a sacrifice to Moloch. The whole land was covered with shrines and high places to foreign gods. Besides this, the treasury was empty, the army disorganized and industry destroyed.

Hezekiah had been brought up under the corrupting influence of such a father and such an environment. Under these conditions it was hard to see how even a strong king could save the country, much less a boy who was the son of a weakling like Ahaz. It surely looked as if the end of Judah had come, and the fate of Israel would be her fate. Isaiah had predicted the downfall of the kingdom, and to all human appearances nothing could prevent his prophecy from being fulfilled.

But the young king surprised everybody. He had opinions of his own, and a will to carry them out. He made no display of strength against outside foes, for he had no strength, but began a reform from within. His first attention was given to religion. He closed up the heathen worship which his father had fostered, and organized the worship of God in harmony with the Law of Moses. The recreant priests were ordered to clean house in the temple, and commanded to carry out the ritual of former days. Part of this had been lost, but Hezekiah had the spiritual common sense to carry out the ceremony of worship correctly

as far as he could and trust God to accept the will for the deed where he fell short.

After this reformation, he conceived a daring idea. He would revive the great feast of the Passover at Jerusalem and invite not only the people of Judah to attend but all the tribes of Israel, as far as they could be reached. "So they established a decree, to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem; for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written." His invitation was an exhortation for them to return to the faith of their fathers, and he expressed the thought that all their sorrows had come because they had been recreant to that faith.

Many responded to Hezekiah's summons, and they had a glorious time. What remained of the altars erected to foreign gods were destroyed, and the people experienced such a sensation of joy as had not been felt since the days of Solomon, when the great temple was dedicated, and they decided to celebrate the feast for two weeks rather than one. Religion has a wonderful power for good on people. True worship brings joy to the souls of men and women that nothing else can give. Hezekiah made a new nation out of his discouraged countrymen. He exercised no force; he made no display of power; but they felt that they had a king who was near to God, and that gave them a sense of protection greater than if he had been backed by a large standing army.

Some years after this Hezekiah was sick, nigh unto death, and the prophet Isaiah came to him and said: "Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." This was very definite, and most men would have accepted it as final. It was not so with this good king. He felt that he had some standing with the Lord because of his faithfulness, and he made a fervent appeal for a longer life. His prayer is very suggestive. "I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before

thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight."

Even the Lord could not withstand a prayer like that, for back of it was a life of good deeds. Isaiah had not gone far before he was commanded to return and say to Hezekiah that the Lord had heard his prayer, and fifteen years had been added to his life. This is a very vivid demonstration of the fact that we pray not only with our lips, but with all the thoughts and deeds of our lives. There can be no genuine faith that is not associated with the knowledge that we have done that which was good in the sight of God. The man who walks before God in truth and with a perfect heart can ask in faith, and it shall be given him.

It was written of Hezekiah that "after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among them that were before him." That tribute to his goodness has come down to us through twenty-six centuries. Surely, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold." After a degenerate period Hezekiah came to power, and he led his people back to God. Like sheep they had gone astray, and the good king dug up the forgotten law, opened the temple once more and put his personality behind a great religious revival, the like of which had not been known in Judah before. The result was that joy returned to the hearths and homes of Judah again. God turned aside their enemies, and just as the king had been saved from death through faith, so the nation was saved for more than a century to record and cherish the sacred truths which God had revealed to Israel's prophet. Had Judah fallen with the northern kingdom, the sacred scripture already written would have been lost, and there would have been no more prophets from God's chosen people to reveal new religious truth to mankind. Surely we owe a debt of gratitude to Hezekiah greater than has ever been told.

*Seek the Good*

Nay, never falter; no great is done
By falterers, who ask for certainty.
No good is certain. But to the steadfast mind
The individual will to seek the good,
'Tis that compels the elements and rings
A human music from the indifferent air.
The greatest gift a hero leaves his race
Is to have been a hero. Say we fail,
We feed the high tradition of the world
And leave our spirits in our children's breasts.

—Author Unknown.

*Class Problems*

1. What finally became of the ten tribes?
2. What was the origin of the people that occupied Samaria in the days of Christ?
3. Give an account of the reign of Ahaz.
4. What did Hezekiah do when he came to the throne?
5. Tell all you can about the Feast of the Passover.
6. Why did Hezekiah put restoration of religious observances in the forefront of his reforms?
7. Do we need a religious revival today? Why?
8. Are there any unholy altars staining our land today? Discuss.
9. In what way was the reign of Hezekiah a commentary on Proverbs 14:34?

## Lesson 65

# ISAIAH, THE STATESMAN

Lesson Text: Isaiah 36:13-21; 37.

Song; Student Reading: Isa. 36:6-7; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Isa. 37:20.

Concert Prayer: O Lord our God, when dark days come to us, and the enemy, encompassing our stronghold, summons us to surrender and blasphemes thy holy name, saying that they who put their trust in thee shall perish, give unto us a faith that knows no wavering. Let no word of doubt or fear escape our lips, but like Isaiah in besieged Jerusalem, boldly declare, "He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it." So may we live from day to day with a faith that is immovable and a trust in thee that is as unshaken as the everlasting hills. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. —Isaiah 37:35.*

Explain: 36:13 Rabshakeh. 37:22 Virgin. 24 Height * * * Caramel. 25 Digged. Have I dried. 26 Done * * * formed it? That thou. 28 Abode. 29 My hook. 30 Shall be a sign. 36 The angel. 38 With the sword.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Faith and Prayer*

The chronology of Isaiah is very difficult to follow. Certainly Hezekiah's sickness, and the promise of fifteen years that should be added to his life, came long before the events recorded in this lesson, but in the text that incident is mentioned in the next chapter. His call, an account of which is given in the sixth chapter, ought to have come in the first. And so it is all through the book. Just why the editors, in making the arrangement of his prophecies and sermons, should have done it in this unsatisfactory manner, we are at a loss to understand.

Another difficulty that we shall encounter in our study, not only of Isaiah, but of all the prophets, is our lack of knowledge concerning the political and historical movements of the time in which they lived. They were not colorless faces from the dead to their contemporaries as they are to us.

The truths they announced were not presented in abstract form, but had some relation to the age in which they lived, and adapted to the special circumstances of the persons whom they addressed. What they said and wrote grew out of problems that confronted them at the time. The message of Isaiah was for the men and women of the Judah and Jerusalem of his own day. Of course, some of the great principles he announced have a much wider range of application. In some matters he was a prophet to all the ages, but his primary interest was in the needs of his own day. A great danger threatened his city and nation. Assyria had taken captive the people of Samaria, and were knocking at the gates of Jerusalem. His problem in our lesson today was to save the city, and to that end he directed his efforts.

We are confronted with another difficulty in this lesson: Was there one siege of Jerusalem, or two by Sennacherib? Dr. Kent maintains that the incidents connected with our lesson today did not occur until 690 B. C., and that a previous siege took place in 701, in which Hezekiah had disregarded the advice of Isaiah and had been compelled to pay the Assyrian king an enormous indemnity to save the city. For our purpose, however, it is not a question of great importance. The facts recorded in our text are admitted in either case. What we desire to emphasize is the supreme faith manifested by Isaiah, and the power with God of Hezekiah's earnest prayer for the deliverance of the city.

Consider the situation. Sennacherib, by the mouth of his representative, Rabshakeh, demanded the unconditional surrender of Jerusalem. And he gave good reasons to show that it would be to the best interests of the people to comply with his request, by calling attention to the fact that not a single nation, not even Israel, had been able to hold out against Assyria. He pleaded with the people not to let Hezekiah deceive them into believing that the Lord would save them, for no power could deliver them out of the hands of the king of Assyria. Then he names the nations that

have fallen, warns the elders of the city to beware of what will happen to them also if they are foolish enough to trust in their king and their God. So deep was the impression that Rabshakeh made that Hezekiah's messengers held their peace and answered him not a word.

We may be sure that there was consternation in Jerusalem that night. The king rent his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord. Then he sent representatives, also covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah with the word: "This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy. * * * It may be the Lord thy God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God, and will reprove the words which the Lord thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left."

Isaiah sent word to Hezekiah to have no fear of the words spoken by the insolent messenger of Sennacherib, that no harm would come to the city. Shortly after this, Rabshakeh again sent messengers to Hezekiah, warning him not to hold out against his king. Again he repaired to the temple and offered one of the most fervent prayers recorded in the Old Testament. He reminded the Lord that Sennacherib had reproached the living God, and had boasted the laying waste of all nations and countries and of casting down their gods, and concluded by saying: "Now, therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord, even thou only."

Isaiah immediately sent word to Hezekiah that the Lord would punish the Assyrians for their presumption in challenging the God of Israel, and closed a long statement with this remarkable promise: "He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord." It took a degree of faith to issue such a statement in the face of a threat made by a man who had

185,000



subdued all nations and kingdoms. What could little Jerusalem do against the hosts of an empire that covered the known world? Judging by all that had happened, Rabshakeh was justified in making the boast that he did. But as we have seen so many times in these lessons, when God was with his servants, they were invincible. This is what happened: "Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and four score and five thousand; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies."

It has been said of Isaiah that he died with the Gospel on his lips, and no greater tribute could be paid to a man who lived 700 years before Christ was born. His counsel was based on the principle of impartial justice. He was hampered by no racial prejudice, for his faith was in a God of righteousness, who ruled not only Judah but the world. Some of his contemporaries no doubt accused him of inconsistency, when, having advised Ahaz to form no alliance with Assyria, he later counseled Hezekiah to remain loyal to Assyria. But Isaiah saw clearly that the little petty kingdoms that were trying to get Judah to join them in throwing off the yoke of Sennacherib were unable to free themselves. During most of his life, Isaiah stood out against public opinion, in what he considered to be the best interests of the nation. But time vindicated his position. He constantly courted opposition and hatred by condemning the mistakes of the ruling classes, and the crimes which were destroying the nation. He challenged corruption and injustice in high places; not even the king himself was exempt from his attacks. One great thought dominated his life—Jerusalem must be saved. The busy life of the holy city was part of his life; its sacred shrines were dear to him, and he gave himself unreservedly to the task of cleansing it from iniquity. How bitterly he scourged the rulers who "grind the faces of the poor," the religious leaders "who stagger with strong drink," the pious frauds who pray while their "hands are full of blood," and the landlords, "that

join house to house." Neither did he spare the women who "with stretched forth necks, and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and make a tinkling with their feet." How modern it all sounds!

"Cease to do evil and learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow," was the burden of his cry. He dreamed of a messianic king who should make the name of Jerusalem glorious: "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end."

---

Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen;
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed on the face of the foe as he pass'd;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still!

—Byron.

*Class Problems*

1. Why are the prophets difficult to understand?
2. What can you say about the arrangements of the chapters in Isaiah?
3. What relation did the prophets have to their own time? To a future time?
4. What challenge did Rabshakeh make to the people of Jerusalem?
5. What did Hezekiah do about it?
6. What counsel did Isaiah give the king?
7. Tell about Hezekiah's prayer.
8. What final statement did Isaiah make concerning Sennacherib?
9. What happened to his army?
10. Discuss the teachings of Isaiah.

## Lesson 66

# MICAH, THE PROPHET OF THE POOR

Lesson Text: Micah 1:1-6; 2:1-3; 3:8-12; 5:2; 6:6-9.

Song; Student Reading: Micah 2:1-3; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Deut. 10:12.

Concert Prayer: Righteous and eternal Father, we thank thee that thou didst inspire thy servant Micah to give to ancient Israel the great religious truth which no generation can outgrow, and which is the heart of our lesson today. Help us to do justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. We are prone to forget, and may we through thy Holy Spirit ever be reminded of these immortal precepts of true religion and practise them in our lives from day to day, that thy name may be glorified throuvh us, in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? —Micah* 6:8.

Explain: 1:1 Morasthite. Which he saw. 2 All ye people. His holy temple. 5 Jacob * * * Israel. High places of Judah? Samaria * * * Jerusalem? 6 Plantings of a vineyard. 2:3 This family. 3:11 Is not the Lord among us? 12 High places of the forest. 5:2 Thousands. Unto me. 6:6 Calves of a year old?

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *True Religion*

Should you ever have the rare privilege of visiting Hebron, where Abraham lived, and where he and Isaac and Jacob and their wives were buried, you must not fail to take a little side-trip to Beit-Jibrin. This place is nothing more than an adobe village now, but it has an interesting history, part of which is connected with this lesson. Nearby is a bare mound, on and around which was the ancient Moresheth-gath, the home of Micah. And if you truly learn to know this prophet of the poor, you will esteem it one of the rarest privileges of your life to stand on the site where his voice was heard—a voice that has been ringing through the world for more than twenty-six hundred years, and is far from silent yet. With what reverence we might walk around that silent hill on which his home was built, and remember how he thundered against those who "covet fields and seize

them," who cast women "out from their pleasant houses," who "abhor justice, and pervert all equity," who "teach for hire," and "divine for money."

Micah was a contemporary of the great Isaiah, and their messages supplemented each other. Isaiah belonged to the upper classes, and counseled with kings and rulers, while Micah was a rustic, living in an obscure village, and, like Amos, found God among the poor and lowly. His personal relationship was not with the leaders, but with the common people who found in him a great champion and defender of their rights. He attacked with greater directness and in more scathing terms the wrongs they were compelled to endure, than did Isaiah. And that is saying a great deal, for the Jerusalem prophet never minced words.

Micah must have had a striking personality. He seems to have combined the great qualities of both Amos and Hosea in his single person. His passion for justice was intense, and he had a heart of love. In 3:8 he tells the secret of his power: "But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin." With such an equipment he fearlessly uncovered the sins of the vampires who were sucking the life-blood of the poor. His words fairly quiver with a strength that shook the nation, and was an imporant factor in influencing king Hezekiah to undertake his great reforms.

Isaiah clung to the idea that a remnant of Jerusalem would be saved; not so Micah. "Therefore shall Zion for your sake (the poor) be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest." This was his prophecy of judgment against the city that preyed upon God's poor. A century later Jeremiah quoted these words of Micah as a warning to his generation, that God would surely fulfil the prediction unless they repented.

Micah was the first of all the prophets to turn attention to Bethlehem as the birthplace of the coming Deliverer. The

From a drawing by Gustave Dore'

THE PROPHET MICAH

King was not to be born in wicked Jerusalem, but in the little village of David. He was to be of humble origin, and have a share in the burdens of the poor. Like his great progenitor, the son of Jesse, the Messiah of Israel was to spring from the common people.

But the most amazing thing of all in the life of this man of the soil was the miracle that his spirit should grasp a religious truth that all the centuries cannot outgrow. This prophet of God leaped the ages to declare a truth that we in the twentieth century of the Christian era have not caught up with. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" This is the greatest saying in the Old Testament. When President Eliot of Harvard was asked to choose a description of true religion to be placed upon the walls of the Library of Congress at Washington, he selected these words of Micah.

Let us briefly consider what this definition of religion implies. (1) To do justly. Justice is an attribute of God. It is the basis of moral character. Not the justice that insists on its pound of flesh, but the great ideal of justice embraced in the Golden Rule: "Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."

(2) To love mercy. This embraces kindness and compassion. It is a higher quality than simple justice. Justice without mercy is cold and indifferent. There is no good will or kindness in it; and, of course, love is entirely absent.

(3) To walk humbly. When will we ever learn the need of humility? "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree" is revealed to us on every hand; and yet we persist in our pride. Only the humble can walk with God. We must surrender our will to his will, and go with him in the direction that he is going. Humility is the crowning glory of religion, and its greatest ornament.

And so we sit humbly at the feet of Micah, and learn

what true religion is. We feel his fellowship with God, and catch the spirit of his love for the poor. We hear his cry of "back to Bethlehem, back to David," and remember him as the boy from the country who conquered his nation's enemies and secured peace. And we may add, back to his descendant Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind both rich and poor, who was born in a stable, the son of a peasant girl, himself a toiler, who spoke of the fields and folds, of the flowers and hills, of the sowers and fishermen, of birds and trees; he was the friend of the humble and poor, healed the sick and comforted the sorrowful. Let us always remember that Christ came from the ranks of the poor, and spent his happiest days in ministering to their needs.

With one tremendous sentence, Micah brushed away the delusion of a mechanical ritual that could take the place of ethical righteousness. What were a thousand rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil, compared with justice and mercy and walking humbly with God? Let us take his message to heart, for if we listen we, too, may hear the cries of the hungry and naked. If we look, we may see the pinched faces of the helpless poor. What will be our answer to their pitiful cries?

"And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (4:3.) That was the vision of a day to come. When that happy condition is realized there will be no poor; then, and not till then, may we look for the social righteousness which was Micah's great ideal. Universal peace and human brotherhood are still in the future. To attain these ends we should resolve to give the best we have. A cause so holy is worthy of a consecration, such as Micah gave to the great problems of his day. God cannot bring peace alone; it can only come with our cooperation and support.

Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, a quartet of mighty prophets, all lived in the same half century, within a radius of twenty miles of Jerusalem. Their hatred of wrong and

injustice, and their intense passion for righteousness, permeated with the divine love of Hosea, sent streams of light through the centuries, and fulfilled the promise God made to Abraham, that through his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed.

---

*The Hero*

I like the man who faces what he must
With step triumphant and a heart of cheer,
Who fights the daily battles without fear;
Sees his hopes fade, yet keeps unfaltering trust,
That God is God, that somehow true and just,
His plans work out for mortals. Not a tear is shed
When fortune which the world calls dear,
Falls from his grasp; better with love a crust
Than living in dishonor; envies not, nor loses faith
In man. But with a smile and words of hope
Gives zest to every toiler. He alone is great
Who by a life heroic conquers fate.

—Author Unknown.

*Class Problems*

1. Tell all you can about Micah's home.
2. Give a character sketch of Micah.
3. What were some of the evils he sought to correct?
4. What gave him his strength and fearlessness? (3:8.)
5. What prediction did he make concerning Jerusalem? How was this averted for the time being?
6. What did he say concerning Bethlehem? (5:2.)
7. What was his definition of true religion?
8. What is Micah's message to us?

LESSON 67

# JOSIAH, THE REFORMER-KING

Lesson Text: 2 Chronicles 34:14-16, 29-33; 2 Kings 22:1-12; 23: 1-3, 21-25.

Song; Student Reading: 2 Kings 23:1-3; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: 2 Kings 23:25.

Concert Prayer: Eternal Father, may thy word be a lamp unto our feet and light unto our path. Help us to realize that we cannot find that lamp nor see that light without prayer and diligent study. To most of us the scriptures are undiscovered. They bring no light because they are far removed from our daily thoughts and affections. Wilt thou guide our search for the sacred truths which they contain. Thousands have found in thy word the bread of life and in its waters a living fountain. Inspire and help us also to make this great discovery, we humbly pray. Amen.

*Memory Text: Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. —Psalms* 119:105.

Explain: 2 Chron. 34:14 The money. Found a book. 15 Hilkiah answered. The scribe. 30 All the men. 32 Stand. 33 Abominations. Made all * * * to serve. 2 Kings 22:1 Boscath. 4 That he may sum. 5 The doers of the work * * * to the doers of the work. 8 The book of the law. 23:2 The prophets. 3 By a pillar. 21 The passover. 22 There was not holden. 24 Images.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Finding the Bible*

It is strange how in Judah the good and bad kings are intermingled. The wicked Ahaz is the father of the good Hezekiah. Manasseh, his son, was among the very worst kings that the nation had, and his son Amon was no better, while Amon's son, the great Josiah, was the best of kings. Much must have depended upon their education, for their inheritance was the same. They all belonged to the house of David. Perhaps their mothers had something to do with it. Whatever it was that influenced Josiah, he was the greatest reformer among all the kings of Judah. The heathenism, which had become so entrenched during Manasseh's reign, was destroyed and in its place was established, under a new covenant by the people, the pure worship of Jehovah.

Even as a boy, Josiah began to clean house around the temple and all over the land. As he grew older he continued the good work. Then a great thing happened. While they were cleaning the rubbish that had accumulated in the temple, the priest who had charge discovered a roll of ancient writing and brought it to the chief scribe. He declared that it was the law given by Moses to Israel, probably the book of Deuteronomy. Josiah was greatly impressed with the discovery, and sent his great high priest, Hilkiah, with the manuscript to Huldah, a prophetess, who told them what it meant. Imagine how a religious man like the king would feel when he read the curses pronounced by the Lord in Deuteronomy 28, if Israel failed to keep the commandments of God.

The finding of the law gave Josiah's work new energy. He gathered the leaders in his kingdom together, and had the law read in their hearing. The reading transformed them. The king stood on a platform in the temple and made a vow before the Lord that he would faithfully observe the law that had been read, and all the leaders and nobility that had gathered there did likewise. The first thing that they undertook to do was to observe the Passover, which had been neglected since the days of Hezekiah, more than seventy years before, and then the land was thoroughly cleansed from all foreign cults and the religious debris that had accumulated since Josiah's great grandfather's day. It was a genuine reform. He appointed worthy priests; he encouraged prophets; drove out of the land all the pagan priests; swept from the country all religious fakers, witches, fortune-tellers, star-gazers, wizards and household gods. Such energy for true religion on the part of a king had not been known since the days of David.

What could be finer than a leader like that—a leader who with all his heart and soul followed God. It is surely refreshing in this land where the people were so prone to forget God, so given to idolatry, to find a powerful king like Josiah who dedicated his life to God. His boundless

energy for righteousness fills us with enthusiasm. The world is always waiting for that kind of man. He found the nation more than half heathen, and he left it thoroughly Jewish. It is really wonderful what one man can accomplish if he puts his heart in the task, and his whole mind to its accomplishment.

It is interesting to note also that he got the inspiration to make these great reforms from the Bible. The moral and religious regeneration which spread over the land came from the discovery of a part of one little book of the law. We might ponder this statement with profit. There is a Bible in nearly every home today, but in most of these homes it is lost in the rubbish of current literary productions. It is not enough to own a Bible; it must be used, mastered and understood. Generally every book we have is read before we turn to the book which fired Josiah with such a holy zeal that he turned his kingdom upside down.

Henry van Dyke, speaking of the Bible, says: "No man is poor or desolate who has this treasure for his own. When the landscape darkens and the trembling pilgrim comes to the valley named of the shadow, he is not afraid to enter; he takes the rod and staff of scripture in his hand; he says to friend and comrade, 'Goodbye; we shall meet again;' and comforted by that support, he goes toward the lonely pass as one who walks through darkness into light." And thousands more who know this holy Book corroborate his testimony. How then can we doubt the truth of what they say?

Should we not give this matter serious thought? If a place was pointed out to us where by working hard and digging deep we might discover stores of gold, would we not toil and slave from day to day, until we came to the treasure? There would be no let-up to our efforts until we succeeded. The Bible is a gold mine of riches that ministers to the growth of the soul. But it has to be studied and pondered; and as we continue to dig, we come in time to its divine strata of truth. We must seek diligently for the in-

spiration and revelation which it contains. It is the story of how men sought and found God and how, when they found him, their strength and zeal for righteousness were increased a hundred fold.

We should make this matter intensely personal. No matter what others may say or do, let us resolve to find the treasures hid in this sacred volume. Talking about the Bible in glowing terms helps us but little. We must discover what it is for ourselves. Let each of us say to himself or herself, "If the Bible is the bread of life, then I will eat that bread. If it is the water of life, then I will drink that water. If it is a lamp to my feet, then I must see that it shines where I walk." Surely, if the Bible can be used to feed our lives with heavenly food, we cannot afford to ignore it; if it is a light to us in darkness, we must not turn our backs on that light.

In our texts, we are touching a chapter here and there, but these lessons are a mere introduction to the great unexplored depths of spiritual truth that the Bible contains. Unlike the mine of gold in the mountain fastness, which can only be owned by one person or company, this treasure may be had by all. Its truths are God's gifts to every one, but each man must find them for himself, with such helps and tools as have been provided to aid him in his search.

What say you, then, each of you who reads the story of this discovery; will you not also resolve to find the Bible? Read it every morning to begin the day, or the last thing at night before you retire. Talk about it with your friends. Ask your teacher the meaning of its obscure passages. Get a commentary, take advantage of every opportunity to learn more about it. Pray, listen, think, study from day to day. Live with these men of God, ponder their words, learn to know them and the source of their strength and courage, and their burning zeal for righteousness. Then at last you will find yourself walking with them to the very throne of God, and you too will have a message to deliver to mankind.

*Our Mother's Book*

We search the world for truth; we cull
The good, the pure, the beautiful
From graven stone and written scroll,
From all old flower-fields of the soul;
And, weary seekers of the best,
We come back laden from the quest,
To find that all the ages said
Is in the book our mothers read.

—J. G. Whittier.

*Class Problems*

1. How can we account for Josiah's zeal for God, when we consider the wickedness of his father and grandfather?
2. What incident changed the course of Josiah's life?
3. How have we lost our Bibles?
4. How may we find our lost Bibles? Mention different practical plans.
5. Why was Huldah able to interpret the law? Have we Huldahs today?
6. Should the Bible be taught in our schools? Discuss.
7. What can we do to help any great reform movement?
8. Is this statement true: "Every man must discover the Bible for himself?" Discuss.

LESSON 68

# ZEPHANIAH, THE PROPHET OF JUDGMENT

Lesson Text: Zephaniah 1.

Song; Student Reading: Zephaniah 1:2-3; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Zephaniah 1:15.

Concert Prayer: O God of heaven above and earth beneath, the same yesterday, today and evermore, help us to remember that thy Fatherhood is not the whole of thy relationship to thy children. Thou art also a God of Judgment, a moral Ruler, a holy Judge. In the fiery trials that shall come to the wicked, may we be able to stand and our work abide. Fortify us against sorrow and defeat and the sense of failure. Bless our homes and loved ones. Give to us, whether our years be few or many, the sense of permanence and confidence in thy righteousness and justice. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Memory Text: But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.—II Peter* 3:10.

Explain: 3 Stumbling blocks. 4 Stretch out mine hand. 9 Leap on the threshold. Fill their masters' houses. 10 The fish gate. 11 Maktesh. 12 Search * * * with candles. Settled on their lees.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Coming Lord*

During the long reign of Manasseh, fifty-five years, who succeeded Hezekiah, idolatry flourished in Jerusalem and Judah as never before. This wicked king introduced all sorts of foreign cults and abominations, even going so far as to sanction the burning of first-born children as sacrifices in the valley of Hinnom. That was what Micah had reference to when he indignantly asked: "Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" It is likely that this horrible practise extended also into different parts of the kingdom. The immoralities and other crimes associated with these foreign forms of worship brought the nation to the verge of ruin. Amon who succeeded Manasseh was no better than his father. It looked as if Judah was doomed. Fortunately,

however, the king was assassinated, and the boy Josiah came to the throne.

The young king, perhaps through the influence of his mother, had come under the tutorship of a group of men who were loyal to Jehovah, and they continued to influence him after he became king. Among those who grew up with him and who it is claimed became his teacher was Zephaniah, also of royal birth, a descendant of the good king Hezekiah. This young man, brooding over the sins of his country and the sufferings of the poor under Manasseh and Amon, finally can contain himself no longer, and breaks forth in a prophecy of doom against Jerusalem.

When he prophesied he was a young man, perhaps not more than twenty. His book is one of the saddest in the Bible, perhaps the very saddest, all but the closing part of it, from the 14th verse of the 3rd chapter to the end. This is so different that it must have been added at a later date. Perhaps those who put the Old Testament together felt that they could not let so sad a book stand, and so appended this glorious hymn of hope to Zephaniah's prophecy of total destruction. Had he written it himself, it would have spoiled the effect of the lesson he was trying to teach.

At first thought, we may wonder how a man so young could write a book so sad, especially when it is remembered that he was a prince and heir to the best in the land. But youth is generally pessimistic, for it lacks the perspective to see the compensations in life. Zephaniah saw vividly the awful sins of the rich and the sufferings of the poor among his people, and his heart was unutterably sad. He saw the men who had sworn to uphold the laws and religion of Jehovah, dressing themselves in pagan costumes, bowing down on their housetops in worship to the stars. On every hand he witnessed the grossest immorality, lawlessness, rioting and plunder. Worse still, men had become complacent, selfish, indolent, cruel, and "settled on their lees." They were absolutely indifferent, saying, "The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil." Against this dark back-

ground of Jerusalem's crying sin and shame, the sensitive soul of young Zephaniah shrank in dismay, and he saw no hope of deliverance, and in the name of the Lord he cried: "I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling blocks of the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the Lord."

All great souls have felt the same, when they have seen the sin and suffering of the world. The famous Charles Kingsley's face was set in sadness one day when he watched some children at play. When a friend asked him why, he replied: "I am thinking of what they are growing up into." A story is told of Oliver Wendell Holmes, who was clambering over some rocks at East Gloucester, Massachusetts, when suddenly his face twitched in pain. On being asked if he was hurt, he pointed to the mouth of Gloucester Harbor where so many fishermen had lost their lives, and then to the town where their widows and fatherless children lived, and said: "Oh, how can God bear it, this ball of misery forever spinning before him and the hum of wretchedness going up to his ears?" Zephaniah saw this also and his heart was sad.

With the beginning of the fourteenth verse a new note is struck. "The great day of the Lord is near." The prophet sees God himself coming to take a hand in human affairs and destroy the evil that is defacing the world. The technical name for this kind of prophecy is apocalyptic prophecy. It is a vision of God coming personally to bring down evil and set up righteousness. Zephaniah has the distinction of being the first prophet in the Old Testament to advance this idea. It is used by several prophets later, and the whole book of Revelations in the New Testament is apocalyptic, but the idea is always the same—a sudden arrival of God himself, who undoes wrong and sets up righteousness.

Many deny the need of this kind of prophecy. They say that the slow process of ethical improvement by instruction and education is sufficient to bring needed reformation.

But there are times when these processes are too slow. A sudden vision of God, such as Zephaniah had, coming to take command, is most helpful. Jesus himself made use of it. Near the end of his life, when the pressure of the cross bore heavy upon him, and the clouds grew dark around him, and it seemed as if his work was going down to shame and defeat, he said, "I see the Son of man coming in power and great glory." And then he describes the great day when the judgments of God were to be visited upon the world.

In the dark days of the Civil War, right at the time when things looked their worst for the North, a young Northern woman was in Washington. Everybody expected the city be taken by the Confederacy, and the hearts of the people were filled with intense anxiety and forebodings of disaster. Despondency was written on every face, for every ray of hope had gone. The young woman was keenly alive to the situation, and wrought up to the highest tension of despair. Of course she could not sleep—no one could—and one dark night as she lay brooding over the situation, suddenly she had a vision of the coming of the Lord. Immediately she slipped out of bed, lit her candle, seized a pen and wrote:

> Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
> He is tramping out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
> He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible, swift sword;
> His truth is marching on.

"The Battle Hymn of the Republic" is a perfect description of Zephaniah's "great day of the Lord." His stirring words of judgment had their effect in helping to bring about the great reformation under Josiah. The people turned to God once more, foreign altars were destroyed, pagan priests exiled, the terrible Scythians from the north

who had threatened the destruction of the city, and did in fact destroy the cities as far down as the Philistine plain, were turned aside, and Jerusalem was safe once more through repentance.

---

*Battle Hymn of the Republic*

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never
call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His
judgment seat;
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant,
my feet!
Our God is marching on.
In the beauty of the lilies, Christ was born across
the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you
and me;
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make
men free,
While God is marching on.

—Julia Ward Howe.

*Class Problems*

1. Describe the conditions in Judah during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon.
2. Tell something about Josiah's education.
3. Tell all you can about the ancestors of Zephaniah.
4. What inspired his prophecy?
5. It has been said of his prophecy: "No deadlier book lies in the Old Testament." What is meant by that?
6. What is meant by apocalyptic prophecy? Give other examples.
7. Why is that kind of prophecy needed at times?
8. What was the effect of Zephaniah's prophecy?

LESSON 69

# NAHUM, THE PROPHET OF MORAL INDIGNATION

Lesson Text: Nahum 1;3.

Song; Student Reading: Nahum 3:1-3; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Nahum 1:3.

Concert Prayer: Eternal God, may there ever ring in our ears thy voice and words from Sinai. We are inclined to look with good-natured tolerance upon sin and make light of transgressions, which thou hast condemned in scathing terms. Help us to repent of this attitude. Let the lesson of today sink deep into our souls. May it leave with us the lasting impression that the way of the transgressor is hard, and there is no final hope for the individual or the nation that continues to flout the laws of justice and righteousness. Amen.

*Memory Text: The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.* —*Nahum* 1:7.

Explain: 1:3 He is slow to anger. The Lord hath his way. The clouds are the dust of his feet. 8 The place thereof. 3:1 Woe to the bloody city! 2 The noise of a whip. 8 Her wall was from the sea? 11 Strength. 15 The cankerworm. 18 Thy shepherds slumber. Thy nobles. 19 No healing of thy bruise. Bruit of thee.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Modern Ninevehs*

Of all the enemies that afflicted and brought sorrow to Israel, Assyria was the most cruel and relentless. For nearly two hundred years, her armies thundered at the gates of Israel and Judah. As we have seen, Israel fell before her onslaughts in 722 B. C., and Judah suffered from her attacks and the tributes she levied for another century. Through their entire history the Assyrians were cruel and violent. Assurbanipal, who conquered Egypt in 663 B. C., boasted of how he tore off the lips and limbs of kings, compelled a prince to wear around his neck the decapitated head of his king, and how he and his queen feasted in a garden with the head of a Chaldean monarch hanging from a tree above them, whom he had forced to commit suicide. Through all their records they boasted of their awful deeds. They "made pyramids of human heads," and "covered pillars with the flayed skins of their rivals." It was upon such

a people that Nahum pronounced in the name of the Lord an inexorable doom.

Several theories have been advanced in regard to the place of Nahum's residence, but we cannot be certain. One theory is that he lived in Assyria near its great capital Nineveh. The fact that he seems to know all about the city lends color to the claim that his home was not far away. We could wish that it were true, for then he likely would be a descendant of the ten tribes that the Assyrians had taken captive from the land of Israel a hundred years before. Nothing could be more fitting than that such a man should pronounce the doom that should shortly overtake the proud nation that had trampled the rights of mankind in the dust for so many generations.

The exact date of the prophecy has not been determined, but it is not likely that it was many years before the nation's fall in 606 B. C. Very few read this pronouncement of destruction, because it is not pleasant reading. A great many people cannot understand how such a book ever got into the Bible. They speak of its coarseness, especially in the second and third chapters, and say that such language should not be used in polite society. These objections are often met with the statement that orientals are more frank in talking about bodily functions than western people. This may be true, but really there is no need of apologizing for the language of the Bible. When the writers of this book talk about iniquities, they use the right word to describe what they mean. We hesitate to use the word "lie," and so we say a man "prevaricates." If a man is "drunk," we modify it by saying he is "under the influence of liquor." If a moral sin has been committed, instead of using the word that the Bible uses, we call it a "regrettable indiscretion."

We do not like to use some of the words that Nahum uses, but he was describing the awful facts concerning the wicked city of Nineveh. He called a spade a spade, and we might well profit by his example. Nahum rejoiced in

her downfall, not from the standpoint of national revenge, but because Assyria was the incarnation of evil. It was an evidence that God might be "slow to anger," but he was a God of power, and would not acquit the wicked. In that fact Nahum saw the triumph of righteousness over evil.

Hatred in the Old Testament is religious at the bottom. It is moral indignation; the trouble with most people today is that they do not know what it is to be morally indignant. And until we develop that capacity we cannot really be good Christians. Read the sweep and breadth of the moral indignation of Jesus. His anger was at white heat when he drove the money-changers from the Temple. Compare Nahum with Matthew 23; you will find the same spirit in both. That old unknown Israelite was hurling the hot fires of his moral indignation in the face of Nineveh for all the sins her people had committed. And Jesus was pouring out his moral wrath upon the hypocrisy and evils of his day.

Rudyard Kipling, the great English author, went into a restaurant in London one day and looked at a table where he saw four young people—two young girls and two young men—all of them drunk. For a moment he stared at them; then he picked up his wineglass and threw it on the floor with a loud crash. Everybody looked around and stared at him. Then with an emphasis that could not be mistaken, he said: "I swear, by God, I have drunk my last drop of liquor!" And he walked out. That was moral indignation.

What do we do when we see a sight like that? We laugh as though the moral degradation of young men and women was amusing. That is the great American sin. We look upon tragedies such as that with humorous, good-natured indifference. Americans lack consecrated indignation, and permit all sorts of vice to flourish unrebuked. A generation ago men poured forth perfect streams of fiery indignation against the saloon, until the very name came to be abhorred. Now the terrible evils which the saloons fostered flourish unchecked and undenounced under other auspices. Nobody gets mad about it. We say it is too bad and something

ought to be done about it, but what can we do? And so with an easy-going indifference we drift along, smiling good-naturedly, while thousands go to destruction every year.

By all means let us read the wonderful book of Nahum. It will make us better Christians. The first chapter begins with a low, ominous rumble. The Lord has been slow to anger, but you begin to feel his power and almost shiver at the low sound of the distant drums. In the second chapter, you hear the shrill blowing of the trumpets; then you have a vivid description of a siege. Next the terrible story of slaughter, of wreckage, of carnage and of victory is recorded. In the third chapter comes the terrible indictment of the sin of Nineveh, for which her corpses are piled one on top of the other, like the pyramids she used to make with her victims' skulls. And finally, is the solemn dirge which Nahum pronounces on the fallen city and all her ways.

The Nineveh of Assyria fell to rise no more, but modern Ninevehs are still standing over against the city of God, and Nahums are needed who have a capacity for the same white-heat of moral indignation to cry out against them. We must not look upon sin with indifference. God hates it now as he did in days of old, and we must be his Nahums to proclaim the doom that overtakes every man or nation that has an Assyrian soul.

---

*A Modern Prophet*

He stood upon the world's broad threshold wide;
The din of battle and of slaughter rose;
He saw God stoned upon the weaker side;
That sank in seeming loss before its foes;
Many there were who made great haste and sold
Unto the coming enemy their swords.

He scorned their gifts of fame, and power, and gold,
And underneath their soft and flowery words,

Heard the cold serpent hiss; therefore he went
And humbly joined him to the weaker part,
Fanatic named, and fool, yet well content
So that he could be nearer to God's heart,
And feel its solemn pulses sending blood
Through all the widespread veins of endless good.

*Class Problems*

1. Tell all you can about ancient Nineveh.
2. Where did Nahum live, and what was the subject of his prophecy?
3. Why are there so few people who read what he said?
4. What danger is there in calling sins by mild names?
5. Relate the incident about Rudyard Kipling.
6. What would most people have done in such a situation?
7. Give a brief review of the book of Nahum.
8. What are some of the modern Ninevehs that should be denounced?
9. What is the message of this lesson to us?

LESSON 70 Heath

# JEREMIAH, THE PROPHET OF ANATHOTH

Lesson Text: Jeremiah 1:6-10; 26:1-15.

Song; Student Reading: Jer. 1:6-10; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Jer. 26:15.

Concert Prayer: Loving Father, we come today into the presence of the great prophet Jeremiah, who for forty long years was thy witness to a disobedient and rebellious nation. As we read the story of his life-long devotion and undying loyalty to his God and his country, may a new ideal of service be born in our souls. Wilt thou sanctify the faithfulness, the courage, the patriotism, the sorrow and the love of this holy man to our spiritual growth and development. In the presence of such men heaven seems near to us, and we can almost hear the rustling garments of our Lord. For the joy this gives us, we thank thee in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord.—Jeremiah* 1:8.

Explain: 1:3 The fifth month. 4 The word of the Lord came unto me. 5 I knew thee. Unto the nations. 6 A child. 26:6 Like Shiloh. 10 The princes. New gate. 12 The Lord sent me. 14 As for me.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *One Man Against a Nation*

If you were in Jerusalem and should ask your guide where Anathoth was located, he would tell you that it was three miles north of the city. No doubt he would also inform you that it was only a little dirty, stone village, with streets narrow and filthy, its inhabitants bedraggled, and the total aspect poverty-stricken and repulsive. All of which you would find to be true when you got there; for, of course, you would visit it. But as you stood in that unsanitary, half-ruined Arab village, you would be on holy ground, and there would come to your memory the story of the great Jeremiah who was born there and who walked those crooked streets twenty-five centuries ago. There he received his prophetic call, not in the spectacular manner in which Isaiah was called in the great temple at Jerusalem, but here in the quiet village where he was born. Neither was his reaction the same as Isaiah's. He did not say, "Here am I; send

me," but on the contrary, "Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child," not necessarily in years but in experience.

Strange how God finds his prophets from among all classes:—Amos from following his sheep, Hosea from the tragedy of his broken home, Isaiah from the nobility of Jerusalem, Micah from his farm, Zephaniah from the royal house of Judah, and now Jeremiah from the squalid village of Anathoth. Age, education, social standing, occupation, wealth and outward appearance count for nothing, when God goes forth to choose his messengers. The only thing that matters is the inner life of the man. He looks at the heart and searches the soul to discover those who are to be his witnesses.

Of all that immortal group, however, whom we have named prophets of God, none had a task so difficult to perform as Jeremiah. Naturally sensitive to criticism, he shunned publicity. He was not eloquent like Isaiah, nor bold like Elijah, but timid and shrinking, conscious of his weakness, yearning for love and sympathy, but never receiving any. Such was the man that God called to be his mouth-piece to the corrupt and degenerate age in which he lived. Add to this the special difficulty that attached to his particular task of warning a nation steeped in egotism and self-righteousness, with the firm conviction that no earthly power could ever destroy the holy city of Jerusalem, and we can understand why Jeremiah hesitated to assume the mighty responsibility which God placed upon him.

The rôle Jeremiah had to play was much more difficult than that given to Isaiah. The latter prophet had a large personal following in sympathy with his views, all zealous worshipers of Jehovah; but in Jeremiah's time, especially after the death of Josiah, there seems to have been a revival of purely external religion. Men went to the temple and performed all the ceremonial laws, but neglected the practical duties of true religion. Such people are the hardest to reach. In Isaiah's day Jerusalem was also in danger, but the prophet was commanded to say: "The enemy shall not

©Underwood & Underwood

ANATHOTH, HOME OF JEREMIAH

A typical Judean village, crowning the bare summit of a little hill on the edge of the wilderness. How strange that such a little town should persist for so many centuries! And how strangely real the life of the prophet becomes as one looks upon the fields that once were his property and the misty mountains that he loved! Here, at the foot of Mount Scopus only three and a half miles from Jerusalem, the priests quietly tilled their fields, and raised figs and olives. Traces of this cultivation remain today, along with ruins of walls and foundations.

come into the city, nor shoot an arrow there," while Jeremiah loved his country as intensely as did Isaiah. Nothing would have given him greater joy than to see it great and prosperous, but he was compelled to predict its fall.

It is hard to be a prophet of decline. Suppose someone should come and say of your city, "The city you love, where your home is located, is doomed to destruction." You would not thank him nor appreciate his message, especially if he gave as the reason the sins of the people living there. No one likes to be reproved for his faults, even if he knows he has them. That was what Jeremiah told the people of Jerusalem, and it made him so unpopular that the leaders threatened him with death. They called him unpatriotic and disloyal, but he could not be loyal to God if he failed to carry out his instructions.

This brings us to a very vital question. Should a man stand by his country if he conscientiously believes that it is headed in the wrong direction? Jeremiah refused to do so. He did not follow the motto, "My country, right or wrong." During the late war a number of men thought that it was wrong for the United States to transport our young men across the sea to fight and give their lives for a cause that did not concern their own nation. So they denounced the war and refused to support it. Our government arrested and imprisoned them, because they were disloyal and unpatriotic. When Jerusalem was besieged by the king of Babylon, Jeremiah advised the king to surrender. The leaders accused him of disloyalty to his country and demanded his death. The question is, who was the true patriot? What determines patriotism? All of us must meet that issue some day and decide whether we will do as Jeremiah did, or like nearly all the ministers in our country did during the late war—support the government. Many of these ministers thought that war was wrong, but that patriotism required them to support the wrong. Of course if they believed that war was right, there would be no question as to how they should stand.

There are many sins in our day similar to those that Jeremiah attacked, but it takes courage to tackle them. Moral questions face us on every hand. Some of them are very complex, and it is difficult to determine just what ought to be done. But this much is certain: our religious convictions should be very sacred to us, or else they have little value. Expediency, side-stepping and compromising with their conscience, have never characterized the great religious leaders of the world. Of course, there is danger of becoming cranks on any question, and unable to look at it in its true perspective; but when we have thoughtfully and prayerfully thought out a question of right and wrong and come to a conclusion, then we should stand by our convictions though the heavens fall.

Jeremiah did that, and we glory in his courage and heroism. His ministry was a life-long martyrdom. He was called to stand alone against a whole nation. His life was constantly in danger. Even his neighbors in Anathoth sought to murder him, and his own family raised the cry that he could not be trusted. Consider for a moment that portion of our text where the priests and prophets declared that he was worthy of death because he had prophesied evil against Jerusalem. Did he equivocate or modify what he had said? Not at all. He reiterated his statement, and then said: "As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you." And he concluded his statement by saying: "For of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears." Such courage and disregard of death make men immortal. Jeremiah was a greater patriot than his accusers. His advice would have saved the city and nation, but it was disregarded for the narrow, fatal policy of men who thought only of their own selfish interests. Many readers love Jeremiah above all the prophets of the Old Testament, and he deserves such a love. He is so loyal to his message, so brave in the face of danger, so keen in his sense of righteousness,

so persistent and devoted! Surely he deserves our deepest admiration.

---

*The Call to Service*

I said, "Let me walk in the fields."
  He said, "Nay, walk in the town."
I said, "There are no flowers there."
  He said, "No flowers, but a crown."

I said, "But the sky is black,
  There is nothing but noise and din."
But he wept as he sent me back—
  "There is more," he said; "there is sin."

*Class Problems*

1. Locate and describe Anathoth.
2. For what is it noted? (See also 1 Kings 1:7; 2:26-27.)
3. Name the different places and circumstances from which God selects his prophets. What determines his choice?
4. Why was Jeremiah's task the most difficult of all the prophets?
5. How did Jeremiah's task differ from that of Isaiah?
6. If our country requires something of us that is against our religious convictions, what should be our attitude?
7. What should be our attitude in regard to a law that is contrary to our convictions? Why?
8. What was Jeremiah commanded to say to the people of Jerusalem? What was the result?

## Lesson 71

# JEREMIAH, THE PREACHER

Lesson Text: Jeremiah 7.

Song; Student Reading: Jer. 5:30-31; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Jer. 6:16.

Concert Prayer: Our Father in heaven, we thank thee for the inspiration that comes from contact with thy great prophets of the past. May we have courage to face the crowd and stand in the gate to proclaim thy word to the multitude. Let no condition arise that shall hinder our loyalty to thee and thy truth. In spite of ridicule, slander and persecution, may we obey thee rather than the precepts of men, and show in our lives fruits of righteousness because of our fellowship with thee. For this we humbly pray. Amen.

*Memory Text: Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. —Jer. 7:23.*

Explain: 3 Cause you to dwell. 4 Lying words. 6 Innocent blood. 8 Cannot profit. 10 We are delivered? 11 Den of robbers? 12 Shiloh. 15 Ephraim. 18 Queen of heaven. 19 Do they provoke me? 21 Put your burnt offerings. 29 Cut off thine hair. 31 Valley of the son of Hinnom. 32 Till there be no place.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Sitting at the Gate*

Unfortunately for Judah, the good king Josiah rashly led an unprepared army against the Egyptian king, who was passing through northern Palestine to attack the Assyrians, and was slain in the battle of Megiddo in 609 B. C. This was an irreparable blow to the reformation which he had inaugurated. There was an immediate reaction against his policy under his son Jehoiakim, supported by the king of Egypt, and a powerful group of reactionaries in Jerusalem, who had resented the rigid religious requirements instituted by Josiah. While the outward forms of the law were in a measure adhered to, it did not take long for the old abuses and wrongs to return. Idolatry again became rampant, and wickedness flourished as never before.

It was at this time that Jeremiah began his ministry in earnest. Today's lesson gives us an idea of his work.

He was commanded to stand at the gate, so that he could speak to all who entered and departed from the temple. "Do not put your confidence in this temple," he said. "You rob immigrants because they are ignorant of their rights, and defenseless wdows and orphans, and do not hesitate to slay men who interfere with you. After such conduct on your part, you think that your hypocritical worship will avail to wipe out your sins. It will do nothing of the kind. The only thing that can possibly save Jerusalem is for you to mend your ways."

With all the eloquence that Jeremiah could command, he tried to get the people to see that God demanded conduct rather than sacrifices. Burnt offerings were actually consumed on the altar; but in the case of other sacrifices, most of the meat was stolen and eaten by the priests or sold for food. Jeremiah called attention to this dishonesty, but said: "Eat all of it, burnt offerings and all. It makes no difference to God with people such as you are." So the prophet denounced their sins, called, warned and plead with the crowds to get right with God and the people they were robbing. Then he added another statement which is very significant: "Neither shall ye walk after other gods *to your own hurt.*"

He was willing to put other gods to the test by the character of their worshipers. The appeal of these foreign deities against whom Jeremiah thundered was wholly to the lower nature of man, and their influence most corrupting. To follow such gods and goddesses meant moral degradation, and Judah was certainly following them "to their hurt." That should be the test of every religion. If Christianity does not make men better, cleaner, give them higher ideals and create a greater love in their hearts for their fellowmen than do other religions, then it is not the best religion and cannot survive.

Jeremiah challenged comparison between Jehovah and other gods. And well he might do so. Israel was but a handful of people compared with the other nations of antiquity, a mere handful in numbers, but what a group of men

she gave to the world! Chaldea, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, with their teeming millions over-running the earth, produced not a single Amos, nor Hosea, nor Isaiah, nor Micah, nor Jeremiah, while little insignificant Israel on the barren highland of Judah gave to the world a whole galaxy of such men. How can this be accounted for except by saying that it had a superior faith, a nobler religion? The people of Israel worshiped a God of justice, love, holiness, righteousness and other divine attributes that lifted men above the material and sordid things of earth into the realm of that spiritual kingdom where they might have fellowship with God. Their faith made man "a little lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honor," while the foreign gods that Israel too often worshiped, "to their own hurt," made man little higher than the beasts of the field, and crowned him with shame and corruption.

Men have called Jeremiah pessimistic and querulous. What else could we expect? Day after day he sat and watched the death-agony of the nation he loved. He beheld the chosen people of God walking blindly toward a doom, which all his pleadings and warnings could not avert. Who can fail to be deeply moved as he follows the history of his life-long martyrdom! Through all the years of his life he suffered contempt, hatred, revilings, mobbings and the bitterest persecution from the people he longed to save. His sorrowing and suffering life is one of the saddest tragedies in human history. And yet he never faltered or wavered in proclaiming the message God had given him to deliver. Such courage and such persistent devotion to his life's mission is one of the finest things recorded in the annals of mankind. Jeremiah should be a constant inspiration to every person who desires to faithfully carry his "message to Garcia." Should he be inclined to falter in his trust, let him think of this prophet and the obstacles he surmounted, and resolve to carry on.

In our imagination we see him there at the gate as he talks to the temple worshipers. Here they come and go,

these idle rich, these oppressors of the poor, these robbers, these murderers, these perjurers, these adulterers, these worshipers of Baal, thinking that a formal act of worship will absolve them from their awful crimes. We hear the scathing words of Jeremiah as he denounced their hypocrisy and warns them of the terrible judgment that is at their doors. "Is this house," he cries, "which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?" These are the very words that Jesus quoted when he drove a similar group of hypocrites from the temple six hundred years later.

But Jeremiah's words are wasted. They give no heed, but walk their own way to their doom. Might we not also take warning from the prophet's words at the gate that led to the temple? Do we go to partake of the Lord's Supper that we may be forgiven, when our inner life is not right in the sight of God? Are we wronging others and perjuring ourselves before God? Are we speaking his name with our lips, and honoring him in his house, while in our hearts we are contemplating some dishonest transaction? If we are guilty of such hypocrisy, let us go and sit at the gate with Jeremiah and hear what he has to say about our conduct.

---

*The Martyr*

A man is thought a knave or fool,
  Or bigot plotting crime,
Who for the advancement of his race
  Is wiser than his time.
For him the hemlock shall distil,
For him the ax is bared,
For him the stake prepared.
Him shall the scorn and wrath of man
  Pursue with deadly aim;
And envy, malice, spite and lies
  Shall desecrate his name.

But truth shall conquer at the last,
For round and round we run,
And ever the right comes uppermost,
And ever is justice done.

—Author Unknown.

*Class Problems*

1. Tell about the death of Josiah. What effect did it have?
2. How can we account for the return of the people to idolatry immediately after the king's death?
3. What was Jeremiah commanded to do?
4. Discuss the statement: "Neither shall ye walk after other gods to your own hurt."
5. How may the value of any religion be tested?
6. Applying this test, what can you say of the religion of Israel? Of Christianity?
7. What is meant by "Carrying a message to Garcia?"
8. What was the tragedy of Jeremiah's life?
9. What benefit may we derive from reading the book of Jeremiah?

LESSON 72

# HABAKKUK, THE PHILOSOPHER

Lesson Text: Habakkuk 1; 2.

Song; Student Reading: Hab. 1:12-13; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Hab. 2:14.

Concert Prayer: Loving Father, as thy prophet in days of old came to thee with his problems and perplexities, so may we also turn to thee in times of doubt and uncertainty. Thy ways are not as our ways, and we lack understanding of thy great purposes. When days are dark and we cannot see our way, give unto us a "watch tower," where we may hear thy voice and receive an answer to all our questions. Hasten the day when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. —Hab. 2:14.*

Explain: 1:5 Behold ye among the heathen. In your days. 6 The Chaldeans. 10 They shall heap dust. 14 And makest? 16 They sacrifice unto their net. 2:8 Of the land, of the city. 10 Consulted. 13 The people shall labour in the very fire? 19 Arise, it shall teach!

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Watch Tower*

While Jeremiah is sitting at the gate crying long and loud against Judah's sins, another prophet's voice is heard in Jerusalem. Habakkuk has also seen the terrible iniquity of the city under the reign of Jehoiakim, the degenerate son of the good Josiah. This new prophet cannot understand why God permits such injustice and oppression to go unpunished, and he gives voice to his complaint. "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!" He complains of iniquity, spoiling, strife and contention; that the law is not enforced; that the wicked oppress the righteous, and wrong judgments are rendered.

For answer God makes known that the Chaldeans have been raised up to chastise Judah, and the work which they will do is such as to be almost incredible. Then follows a description of their terrible army, with horses faster than

leopards and fiercer than wolves; their cavalry coming from afar shall be swifter than eagles. "They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them; they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it." (1:9-11.)

But when Habakkuk saw this terrible army in action, saw their cruelty and utter disregard of human rights, laughing at all authority with no regard for either man or God, a new and more serious problem confused him. How could God use such treacherous foes, who were dragging men more righteous than themselves into their awful nets, as his instruments of judgment, when they failed to see in their successes the hand of God? In other words, how could God reconcile his purity and holiness with the cruelty and rapacity of the Chaldeans? To the eyes of Habakkuk, it seemed inconsistent for God to use such awful barbarians to execute judgment on his chosen people. The people of Judah needed correction, but why use a nation that was ten times worse to correct them? Why should such evil as represented by the Chaldeans prosper and go from victory to victory, while God's own people were humiliated to the dust?

Habakkuk's problem virtually resolves itself into the question: "Why do the righteous suffer, and the wicked prosper?" It has been asked through all the ages since his day, but he was the first of the prophets in the Old Testament to raise it. We admire Habakkuk because he dared to lift his face to God and ask for an explanation of certain things which did not seem right to him. It was not lack of faith on his part, for he confessed his confidence in God. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" That

was the question that worried him, and that was the question he challenged God to answer.

Notice how the second chapter begins. "I will stand on my watch tower and will listen and see what the Lord has to say to me." Those are not the exact words of our text, but that is the meaning. What a beautiful statement! Here is the prophet all perplexed, but he knows where to go for help. "I am going to wait and see what the Lord has to say to me." The reason why so many of us fail to get an answer to our religious problems is: first, we do not think God has anything to say; and second, we do not wait to hear what it is. Habakkuk had a different idea. He thought that God had something to tell him, and he would wait and hear what it was.

It is interesting also to note that he waited in the right place, in his watch tower. He got up away from the world where he could be alone with God. Every person should have a place where he can go all by himself, so that he can listen to the message that comes from God. Get into your watch tower and wait for the Lord. He will have something to tell you.

A certain young man had become a source of sorrow and great anxiety to his parents because of his conduct. He seemed to delight in disregarding their counsel and doing the things that they asked him not to do. He became notorious in the community for his lawless attitude, and it was freely predicted that he would soon find himself in jail. At this critical juncture, his father took sick and was confined to his bed for several weeks. During this time the son continued his wild ways, and paid no attention to his father's serious condition. Then came a day when he was informed that his father could not live, and he went to see him. The father was too weak to say much, but he made this dying request of the boy:

"Promise me that when I am gone, you will come to this room every evening for six months and spend a half hour in thought." "What shall I think about?" asked the

son. "I leave that with you," answered the father. This seemed easy enough, and the young man gave his promise.

For the first few weeks he thought about his escapades and planned new deeds of lawlessness. But as time went on the memory of his sick father, as he had seen him lying there in the room, disturbed his thoughts. He recalled his boyhood, and how kind his father had always been to him. Then he thought of his mother in her great sorrow, part of which was caused by his conduct. Her teachings of God came back to him, and he began to feel ashamed of his conduct. Before the six months were gone, he longed each day for evening to come that he might commune with himself and God. He was completely changed; for whereas he had previously thought only of evil, now his whole thought was of the good he might do. So his father's room had become a sanctuary, a holy place where he might come and hear what God had to say.

God had three things to say to Habakkuk in answer to his question, and he told him to write them down. The first was that there would be an end to these difficulties and seeming contradictions. They were only temporary, while the solution was eternal. We often sing at our funerals the song entitled, "Some Time We'll Understand." That was what God said to the prophet, and we ought to be satisfied with that promise and say, "All right, I can wait until God's time has come to reveal the answer."

In the second place God said to Habakkuk, "the just shall live by faith." Paul takes that statement from our text today. Faith here means faithfulness. Let the righteous person, however troubled and baffled he may be, hold fast in his loyalty to God and loyalty to duty, and he shall live. It is God's business to vindicate his methods of discipline and correction. We have only to keep our eyes fixed on our own duties and obligations.

The third thing which the Lord says to Habakkuk is that evil has within itself the seeds of destruction. Pride and tyranny cannot from their very nature last. The evil

that looks so mighty is really dying from within. Five woes are pronounced upon the nation that lusts for conquests, thinks only of individual gain, unscrupulously oppresses others, reduces vanquished people to utter helplessness, and resorts to dumb idols for instruction. Jehovah alone reigns! Righteousness alone endures!

"Truth, crushed to earth, shall rise again;
The eternal years of God are hers;
But Error, wounded, writhes in pain,
And dies among her worshipers."

And so Habakkuk, dear prophet, we salute you across the centuries! You questioned God and waited for his answer from your watch tower. And he said three wonderful things to you, and through you he says them to us. There is going to be an end to evil, but we must wait in patience till it comes. The just shall live by faith, and we need not worry about the evil-doer, since he is living a life that destroys itself; only righteousness shall endure forever. In the meantime, let us also go to the Lord with our problems of doubt and uncertainty. Then like Habakkuk ascend our watch tower and listen and see what the Lord has to say to us.

---

Perplext in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out.
There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.
He fought his doubts and gather'd strength,
He would not make his judgment blind,
He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them: thus he came at length
To find a stronger faith his own.

—Tennyson.

*Class Problems*

1. State the conditions that prompted Habakkuk's prophecy.
2. What was his first complaint? What was the answer?
3. Describe the Chaldean army. (Hab. 1:6-10.)
4. What was Habakkuk's second problem? Importance?
5. Discuss the significance of the watch tower.
6. Tell the story of the disobedient young man.
7. What three answers did Habakkuk receive to his question?

## Lesson 73

# JONADAB, THE RECHABITE

Lesson Text: Jeremiah 35.

Song; Student Reading: Jer. 35:6-7; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Jer. 35:19.

Concert Prayer: Heavenly Father, thou hast brought us into the light of another day with all its possibilities for growth and happiness. Inspire us through this lesson to more fully realize the responsibilities that we owe to one another. Grant that we may stand fast to the best traditions that have come down to us from the past and maintain the high ideals set before us by our church. Help us to set an example that shall be worthy of emulation by all with whom we may come in contact. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: Wherefore, if meat causeth my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh forevermore, that I cause not my brother to stumble.*—1 *Cor.* 8:13.

Explain: 5 Rechabites. Drink. 6 Jonadab * * * commanded us. 7 Build house. Sow seed. Plant vineyard. Many days. 10 Have obeyed. Jonadab. 2 Kings 10:15.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *"We Will Drink No Wine"*

When Jehu was engaged in the extermination of the family of Ahab and Jezebel, he had the hearty support of a chieftain named Jonadab. This man was a son of Rechab and a descendant of a family of Kenites that had joined the children of Israel in the wilderness and found a home with them in the promised land. Jonadab was very much opposed to the house of Ahab, and gladly joined Jehu in helping to bring about its destruction. After this had been effected, Jonadab outlined certain regulations for his family to follow, as stated in verses six and seven. So strictly had these rules been followed that now two hundred years later they were still adhered to. The Rechabites lived in the territory of the northern kingdom, but were left unmolested when Sargon captured Samaria because they took no part in resisting the invaders. So they continued to live quietly in their homes until Nebuchadnezzar came and threw the

whole country into turmoil and confusion. Then they moved to Jerusalem, hoping that after the war they could go home and live in peace. It was during this time that the incident mentioned in this lesson occurred.

The Hebrew prophets had a way of illustrating the lesson they wished to teach by acting it out. Jesus did the same thing when he took a little child and set it in the midst of his disciples as an example of humility, and also when he washed the apostles' feet to teach the great truth that he who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven must become the servant of all. In this case Jeremiah found his concrete illustration from this band of Rechabites, who lived their simple life in tents, even in the city of Jerusalem. He took the entire band up into the house of the Lord where they could be seen by a great number of people, especially those who were most disobedient in their conduct to God's requirements. There he set an abundance of good fragrant wine before them and asked them to drink. This was more than an ordinary temptation because they had great respect for Jeremiah and looked upon him as a man of God.

But they did not drink even at his request. On the contrary, they very definitely refused and stated the reason: "We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons forever." This is one of the most striking examples in history of the influence a good man can have on his descendants for several generations. These people would not drink wine, because their ancestor two hundred years before had forbidden it. Jeremiah made the most of their example by contrasting their attitude with that shown by the leading men of Jerusalem. "Here are these Rechabites," he said, "obedient to the wish of their human ancestor, but you men here will not obey the word of the Lord to whom you owe all that you have." And the prophet, after reminding them of his repeated warnings, once more pleads with them to repent. Then he turns to the Rechabites, and after highly commending them for

their faithfulness in living up to the high ideal enjoined upon them by their ancestor, makes them this remarkable promise: "Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me forever."

This story of the Rechabites is most interesting. The benefits they received from total abstinence of long life and a virile stock are in harmony with the findings of biology. A physician of an asylum for the feeble-minded made a statement recently that fifty per cent of the children in that institution were there as the result of whiskey. The deadly effects of the abuse of alcohol are absolutely established. No one has the temerity even to question the facts that have been brought out against its excessive use. And yet, some of the very men who would be the first to refuse to employ drunken drivers, servants, trainmen and workmen in every line of industry, are crying aloud against the curtailment of their personal liberty by the law against the use of intoxicants. Business men do not want their employees coming back to work on Monday, who have been soused on Sunday. But many of these same men break the law by keeping their cellars well stocked with the best wines and liquors.

Paul was asked a question by the Corinthian saints, whether it was lawful to eat the meat that had been offered to an idol. Often the meat was only partly sacrificed and could be purchased much cheaper than other meat, and it was just as good, but many of the converts were very much prejudiced against using it. Paul replied in effect that so far as he was personally concerned, it did not make the slighest difference. The gods to whom it had been offered were no gods at all, and could in no way affect the meat either for good or evil. But while there was no intrinsic evil in eating idol's meat, yet if by doing so it would cause offense to even the weakest person, he would not permit himself to use it. His exact words are given in the memory text of this lesson.

If some of these valiant champions of so-called personal liberty in our day, who claim the right to drink freely if they feel like it, even though it is against the law, would take this great principle which Paul announced to heart, they would say: "If drinking causeth my brother to stumble, I will drink no liquor forevermore." That is the only consistent attitude that a man who professes to be a Christian can take. Of course, some of these men in high standing who are doing all in their power to nullify the prohibition law would be outraged if they were accused of unchristian-like conduct; but certainly they are not Christians of Paul's type.

Hundreds of millions of dollars are spent annually to break the law in this Christian nation of ours. As a result, our young men and women are growing up without respect for law. They flaunt it everywhere, at their socials, banquets and parties of all kind. Girls as well as boys openly, and without let or hindrance, drink to their heart's content. Intemperance is one of the tragedies of our age, not only from a social and moral standpoint, but from an ecomonic standpoint as well. The very men who today wink at the law will later refuse to give employment to the boys and girls who are becoming unfit and untrustworthy as a result of the whiskey flasks they constantly flourish at their various social functions.

The stand of the Rechabites in refusing to violate their ideal even in the face of a prophet's request is one of the finest examples of courage in the Bible. Nothing is more inspiring than to come in contact with people who stand for something. There are times when to say "No" is the greatest evidence of heroism. Our lives should be guided by certain principles that we are willing to defend even to death. The great trouble in our land today is that there are so many people who do not stand for anything. They have no principles or ideals by which their actions are determined.

*In Common Things*

Dream not of noble service elsewhere wrought:
The simple duty that awaits thy hand
Is God's voice uttering a divine command.
Life's common duties build all the saints have thought;
In wonder-workings or some bush aflame,
Men look for God and fancy him concealed;
But in earth's common things he stands revealed,
While grass and stars and flowers spell out his name.

—M. J. Savage.

*Class Problems*

1. Tell all you can about Jonadab.
2. Why did the Rechabites move to Jerusalem?
3. Why did Jeremiah take them up to the house of the Lord?
4. Why did the prophet offer them wine? Why did they refuse?
5. What great lesson may we learn from the Rechabites?
6. Discuss the question of "personal liberty" in connection with prohibition.
7. Discuss the use of liquor from a moral standpoint. From an economic standpoint. Discuss total abstinence.
8. How should we fortify ourselves against temptation?
9. How may we aid in the enforcement of prohibition?

LESSON 74

# JEREMIAH, THE PROPHET OF AFFLICTION

Lesson Text: Jeremiah 38:1-23.

Song; Student Reading: Jer. 38:4-6; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Jer. 38:20.

Concert Prayer: Gracious Father, we read the heroic story of suffering and sorrow which thy ancient prophet endured, and glory in his fortitude and courage. His faithfulness and devotion to the mission assigned him is an inspiration to mankind forever. By his side we seem only pigmies, but thou canst make us worthy of the heritage he has given to the world. Wilt thou lift us up and create within our souls a strength that shall do all and dare all for thy name's sake. May we become valiant champions of truth and righteousness in our day and generation. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

*Memory Text: Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.—Matthew* 5:11.

Explain: 4 Princes. Weakeneth the hands. 5 He is in your hand. 6 Dungeon. 9 Famine. 10 Take up Jeremiah. 11 Old cast clouts. 19 And they mock me. 22 Sunk in the mire.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *A Lowly Hero*

Shortly after the incident related in the last lesson king Jehoiakim died. He had done all he could to anger king Nebuchadnezzar by his repeated revolts, and had few friends even in Jerusalem; for his whole reign was one of oppression and cruelty. With biting sarcasm Jeremiah asked him if he thought that the fine buildings he had erected by the extortion of money from his subjects made him a great king. The prophet declared that such a ruler would have no mourners when he died, but his burial would be like that of a dead ass that is dragged out of the city.

He left an eighteen-year-old son to succeed him, but Jeremiah declared that neither he nor any of his descendants should sit on the throne of David. Perhaps this statement influenced him to surrender to the Babylonians three months after his father's death. He and his queen mother, the royal attendants and officers all went out and threw themselves on the mercy of the enemy. The conquerors stripped the temple and palaces of all the gold that they

could find. The sacred golden vessels that had been carefully guarded since the days of Solomon were taken with the rest of the spoils.

Then, following the example set by the Assyrian kings, Nebuchadnezzar carried off to Babylon ten thousand men, besides women and children. These captives were the leaders of the country—princes, warriors and skilled workmen. Among them were two men of whom we shall hear later, viz., Ezekiel and Daniel. It was nine hundred miles by the road they traveled to the low, dusty plain of Babylon, where, footsore and disheartened, the wretched exiles at last came to their new home. Accustomed to the Judean mountains and their own highland scenery, we can imagine how they felt on these hot, monotonous lowlands among proud strangers who looked upon them as slaves.

Zedekiah, another son of Josiah, was left to rule in Jerusalem. As a king he proved little better than his brother. His intentions were not so bad, but he was weak and vacillating and completely dominated by his advisers, who seemed to think that they were favored of God over the exiles, upon whom judgment had fallen. Jeremiah told them on the contrary that the best had been taken.

The first exile took place in 597 B. C., and about four years later Zedekiah was ready for another revolt. False prophets counseled the king to join with surrounding nations, and throw off the Babylonian yoke. Against the advice of Jeremiah the king did this. The prophet dramatically put a yoke on his neck as a symbol of what would happen, if the king persisted in his rebellion. One of the false prophets tore the yoke from his neck and broke it, at the same time predicting that the Lord would return the captives within two years. Soon Jeremiah was back with a yoke of iron in place of that of wood, with the prediction that the false prophet would die within the year.

It all turned out as Jeremiah had said, for in the year 589 B. C. Nebuchadnezzar is again at the gates of Jerusalem to punish the rebellious city. Zedekiah is advised by his

counselors and the princes of Judah that they would be able to hold out against their enemies. Jeremiah on the other hand declared: "Thus saith the Lord, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it."

This was too much; the princes and soldiers now decided upon his death. They declared to the king that Jeremiah was hindering the success of their defense of the city, and insisted on getting rid of him. Notice how weak the king was in this critical situation. Every predicton made by the prophet had been fulfilled, and if any man could help them in this extremity it was Jeremiah. But he said: "Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do anything against you." What a poor specimen of a king Zedekiah was!

Then these men put the prophet in a deep bottle-shaped cistern with cold, oozy mud on the bottom, where it would be almost impossible for him to move around. What a dramatic picture of torture and what a fearful death awaited him! When he grew so weak from darkness, hunger and thirst that he could stand no longer, the mouth they hated would be smothered in mud. Surely service in the cause of truth is costly! Every prophet has had to pay an awful price to deliver his message. Jeremiah had fought every inch of the way and every hour of the day for the safety of the city and country that he loved. And this was his reward! Could human cruelty devise a more horrible death? The plan of Jeremiah's martyrdom stands in a class by itself.

But his end had not yet come. Ebed-Melech came upon the scene and undertook his rescue. He was only a poor black slave owned by the king, but he had the courage to go to his master and say: "My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city." The king was alone and he listened to his appeal, and gave him permission to rescue the

brave prophet who faced certain death. Ebed-Melech took thirty men, and with ropes and rags let down into the pit they drew Jeremiah up, and so saved his life. This generous intervention of an obscure servant was sufficient to write his name in the history of brave and unselfish deeds. Slaves are often greater than the kings they serve.

Gloom and darkness hangs over Jerusalem. The dread army that Habakkuk saw is about to capture the city of David. Famine walks the streets of the sacred city, and the end of the great nation from which so much was expected is at hand. But on the threshold of that calamity two brave deeds gleam in the darkness with a light that still shines upon the pathway of men. First is the brave teaching of the prophet, who, in the face of death, proclaims that no force of arms can protect the city. Only surrender can save Jerusalem and her people. He had only to keep still to save his life. Why speak at all? Forty years of faithful service were behind him. On that record he might have stood. But not Jeremiah! Tired, discouraged, certain of defeat he might be, but they must know the unpopular truth, and he spoke it out in power.

And now for a moment let us focus our attention on the humble slave who went out of his way to do the other brave deed. Ebed-Melech had no occasion to intercede for the prophet. He knew how unpopular Jeremiah was. Again and again, he must have seen the hatred of the powerful princes. Why should he endanger his life to save a man whom everybody seemed to hate? It was because he felt the injustice that had been done to a good man in the horrid imprisonment that he was suffering. He thought of the terrible death that awaited him, and putting aside his own safety he went boldly into the presence of the king and told him that the princes had done a great wrong to Jeremiah, and asked permission to save him. It may seem simple enough when we read about it; but really it is a mighty big thing to go out of your way and risk your own life to save a man who has no claim on you. One word from the

king and his black slave would have died for his temerity in interfering with the plans of the men who were dictating the policy of the government. Twenty-five centuries have passed since this obscure black slave at the risk of his own life stood before his king to plead for Jeremiah's life, but his name still lives in the annals of heroism and is blazoned upon the pages of the sacred scriptures for all the centuries to come.

---

*Meditation*

The sweetest lives are those to duty wed,
Whose deeds, both great and small,
Are close-knot strands of an unbroken thread
Where love ennobles all.
The world may sound no trumpets, ring no bells,
The book of life the shining record tells.
Thy love shall chant its own beatitudes
After its own life-workings. A child's kiss
Set on thy sighing lips shall make thee glad;
A poor man served by thee shall make thee rich;
A sick man helped by thee shall make thee strong;
Thou shalt serve thyself by every sense
Of service which thou renderest.

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

*Class Problems*

1. Tell all you can about the first captivity.
2. Give a character sketch of Zedekiah.
3. What fatal mistake did he make in his policy as king?
4. Why was Jeremiah imprisoned? Describe his prison.
5. What fine elements of character do you find in Ebed-Melech?
6. In what way did the negro slave show his courage?
7. Give an account of Jeremiah's rescue.
8. Compare the experience of Jeremiah with that of Jesus.

LESSON 75

# JEREMIAH, THE PROPHET OF A NEW COVENANT

Lesson Text: Jeremiah 31:29-40.

Song; Student Reading: Jer. 31:10; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Jer. 31:13.

Concert Prayer: Eternal Father, we are grateful for this lesson in which thy prophet reminds us that we are individually responsible for the sins we commit, for this brings to our remembrance that the glory of the good we do is also ours. We rejoice that we live in the day when the "inner light" of the new covenant which Jeremiah foresaw is our heritage. May we enjoy to a fulness the grace and truth and forgiveness of sins which come through Jesus Christ, that we may walk no more in darkness, but in the glorious light of the new day which he brought to a discouraged world. Amen.

*Memory Text: Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.—Psalms* 119:11.

Explain: 29 Sour grape. Children's teeth. 31 The days come. 32 Covenant. They brake. A husband. 33 In their hearts. 34 They shall all know me. 35 Divideth the sea. 38 Shall be built.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Law in Our Hearts*

For years Jeremiah had denounced the sins of the people and threatened Jerusalem with destruction. That was when there was hope of escape through repentance. But now that day is past and Nebuchadnezzar, the conqueror from Babylon, is besieging the city. Inside there is famine and pestilence, and Zedekiah the king is at his wits end to know what he can do to save the city. The prosperous and corrupt nobles and leaders no longer go up to the temple and laugh at the prophet as they pass him at the gate, where he urged them to mend their ways. They have been stripped of everything.

But those who remain are still stubborn and hard-hearted. They refuse to surrender, blindly hoping that the God whom they had outraged will deliver them. Jeremiah's warnings of disaster and judgment are over. Terrible days are ahead of them, indeed are upon them already, but now

he strikes a note of hope. He speaks with the voice of encouragement and promise. God cares for them still, especially those who have been more sinned against than sinning. The Lord will remember them, and restore them to their home and city once more.

Then he speaks of personal responsibility. They have been accustomed to blame God for their troubles, and prone to accuse him of being unjust; also they have complained that they suffered because of the sins of their fathers. "Hereafter," said the prophet, "you shall see that every man reaps the harvest of his own sowing. If he does wrong, it is his own fault. Every man has a conscience; he has judgment; he has a will; the responsibility for his acts rests with himself."

But best of all, Jeremiah utters a message that is new to Israel. The day is coming when the covenant of the law shall end, and a new covenant will be given to the people. The religion of the Mosaic Law was a compact—an agreement with God that if his people would do so and so in regard to food, temple, sacrifices, ceremonials, etc., then he would bless and prosper them. The Lord had kept his part of the agreement, but his people had often broken theirs; so it had not worked as well as it might have done, but as Paul later said when he was contending for the higher law, it had been a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ. As we have seen, certain great religious truths had been learned under the old law; but a greater covenant was to come.

For the first time in prophecy the heart becomes important. It is the individual heart that is either good or bad. Jeremiah declared: "In those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, the ark of the covenant of the Lord; neither shall it come to mind; neither shall they remember it." And in our text, "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. * * * I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no

more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them." Jeremiah was virtually saying that their ark of the covenant, their sacrifices and their sacred utensils and machinery would no longer be necessary when this new covenant was ratified. This was more than a reformation; it was a revolution. And Jeremiah had the vision to see the coming of this new day in the darkest hour of his country's history.

How superior this new conception of what God required of each individual was to the old religion of external guarantees for prescribed forms of worship! Under the new covenant, devotion and worship would come from the heart; under the old form, it came from without. Up to this time the outside of the cup and platter had been washed; under the new covenant, the washing would be from within. They had bathed their bodies to become ceremonially clean; in the new order, the heart would be cleansed. If the law of love is once written in the heart, then the individual lives from within outward. The old religion was national; the new religion would be personal, and every man would know the Lord for himself.

The old order of religion was based upon the principle of rewards and punishments, and this led to the awful abuses which the prophets thundered against. Men worshiped God either to receive a blessing or escape some disaster. They tried to buy God's favor. And you remember that king Ahaz set up shrines to the gods of his enemies, that he might gain their good will. The theory was so many prayers, so much reward; so many burnt offerings, so many calamities turned aside; so many religious ceremonials, so many blessings given to the worshipers. No wonder that the great leaders of Israel cried long and loud against these selfish transactions. The abundant life that comes from within scorns such sordid bargainings with God. The heart that loves God does not ask what reward shall I get for this prayer, or what pay shall I receive for this kind word spoken

to one who is hungry for sympathy. A prayer that is given for pay is not a prayer, but a blasphemy. A kind word spoken simply to comply with a commandment is not done to the Savior. That witch of Alexandria, who walked the streets armed with a pitcher of water and a flaming torch, and crying, "Would that I could quench hell with this water and burn heaven with this torch, so that men would love God for himself alone," was voicing Jeremiah's new covenant.

The abundant life that wells up from the fountain of the heart scorns the sordid calculations that try to figure out how much credit the ledger shows one has stored up in heaven. The man who tries to bargain with God in this day of the new covenant will learn to his sorrow that riches in heaven are not determined by a system of mathematics. God has subtler tests than the piece-measure and a time clock. What shall we say of the man who goes to Church for the reward he figures to get in heaven, rather than the warm glow of emotion that comes from fellowship with God? Simply that he debases worship into selfish materialism. And what is said of going to Church, can be said with equal truth of all religious observances. The riches of eternity will never be awarded on any such basis.

Ordinances and ceremonials are still necessary under the new covenant which God has made with his children, but we comply with them not from external pressure, but because they are avenues of reaching God, which he has provided;—and we gladly comply with the plan which has been ordained for entering his kingdom. But it is a response from the heart, not a purchase of salvation by means of an outward act. After the ordinances have been observed, the heart must continue to be the center and source of religious growth.

---

*More Stately Mansions*

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!

Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea.

—O. W. Holmes.

*Class Problems*

1. What were the conditions in Jerusalem at this time?
2. What are the two key-teachings of Jeremiah in this lesson?
3. Are our parents responsible for our acts? Discuss.
4. Compare the old and new covenants.
5. Discuss this statement: "No heritage of sin annuls heredity from God."
6. What did Paul mean when he said that the Law was a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ?
7. Why are ordinances and ceremonies still necessary under the new covenant?
8. Discuss this statement: "God is always waiting to speak to every man."

## Lesson 76

# JERUSALEM, "THE CITY SOLITARY"

Lesson Text: 2 Kings 25.

Song; Student Reading: 2 Kings 25:1-3; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Lamentations 1:8.

Concert Prayer: Our fathers' God, as we read of the nation that went into captivity because it sinned so grievously, we pray that thou wilt bless our own dear homeland and keep it from sin, lest we forget the end of nations that forsake righteousness. We are inclined to boast of our strength and glory in the power that has come to us. Give unto us a humbling sense of our great responsibility. May we remember the price that has been paid for our liberty. We thank thee for the men who died to give us this blessed heritage, and consecrate our lives afresh to the righteousness that shall exalt our nation in the eyes of all good men in every land and clime. Amen.

*Memory Text: Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee.—Deut.* 32:7.

Explain: 1 Built forts. 4 The city was broken up. King's garden. The plain. 7 Put out his eyes. 11 The rest of the people. Of the multitude. 13 Pillars of brass. 15 In gold * * * in silver. 18 Keepers of the door. 19 The * * *presence. The principal scribe. 21 So Judah was carried away. 22 The son of Ahikam. 26 Came to Egypt. 27 Evil-merodach. 29 Did eat bread * * * before him.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *"Lest We Forget"*

Before the final drama ends and the curtain falls on the Jerusalem of David and Solomon and the twenty rulers that succeeded to their throne, let us pause for a moment and take a last view of the city, so sacred to the prophets and so dear to the people of Judah. Standing on the Mount of Olives where Jesus stood six hundred years later and wept over the rebuilt Jerusalem, we look across the valley of Jehoshaphat, later called Kidron, and get a good view of the city. It occupies the southern extermity of a tableland which is cut off on all sides except the north by deep ravines. The valley on the west is called Hinnom. It runs directly south along the western edge of the city, and then turns eastward and joins the valley of Jehoshaphat. A third valley, the Tyropoean, begins near the intersection of the other two and

extends northward cutting the plateau in two hills. These are known respectively as Mount Zion on the west and Mount Moriah on the east. The southern part of Mount Moriah is known as Ophel, also as the city of David.

Ophel was the portion of Jerusalem which David captured from the Jebusites, and made his capital. Here is where he lived and reigned. From this point he planned and directed the campaigns which resulted in the defeat of all surrounding nations. When his son Absalom rebelled against him, he left Ophel, crossed the valley of Jehoshaphat, climbed the ascent of Olives on the other side, and struck across the wilderness on the eastern side down to the Jordan, which he crossed, and made his stand in Gilead. To this place he returned after the rebellion was crushed, and here he grew old and died.

One important thing David did before he died was to purchase the threshing floor of Araunath, located farther up on a ridge of Moriah to the north. This was a wind-swept rock, with a natural cave beneath it for a granary. Here Araunath the Jebusite threshed his wheat. But today after three thousand years this is one of the most sacred spots on the earth to three religions. Here Solomon built his magnificent temple to the westward, and on this rock in front of it reared his altar of burnt-sacrifice. It is still there, and every one who visits Jerusalem goes to see it. The channel graven to draw off the blood through artificial holes into the cave beneath is still to be seen. Everything pertaining to Solomon's temple is now gone, except this rock, and that is in the center of a magnificent Mohammedan mosque, which encloses the spot.

Other beautiful buildings cover Mount Moriah, and a great wall surrounds both the eastern and the western divisions of the city; but alas, the terrible army of the Chaldeans which Habakkuk saw surrounds Jerusalem. For eighteen months now they have besieged the city. In that time none have gone out and none have come in. For many weeks the people have been on rations. Scores have already per-

ished from hunger. Great movable towers have been erected to throw troops into the city when its defenders shall have become exhausted. Jeremiah had pleaded with the king to surrender, but the princes and rulers counseled against it, hoping against hope that there would be some escape. But there was none. God himself had spoken against the city, and at last it fell.

No words can describe the scenes that followed. Zedekiah tried to desert and find safety beyond the Jordan. But he was caught on the plains of Jericho, and brought before Nebuchadnezzar. How fearfully he paid for his rebellion! The last sight the king had was the swords of the enemy piercing his sons' bodies. Then his own eyes were burned out, and he was placed in chains and compelled to walk all the dreary way to Babylon, the sport and jest of his conquerors. All the men of higher grade around whom a revolt could center were cruelly put to death. Nebuchadnezzar did not propose to take any more chances with this rebellious nation.

But to make matters doubly sure, he completely sacked and destroyed Jerusalem. The captain of the rear guard, with crowbar and fire, laid the much-loved city in ruins and ashes. The glorious temple that had for four hundred years been the joy and pride of Judah was stripped and completely razed to the ground. Not one stone was left upon another. All the palaces and beautiful public buildings were also burned. Every house in the city was rendered uninhabitable. The great walls were thrown down, and on the place where Jerusalem had been, nothing was left but desolation. What an awful memory for the exiles in Babylon during the next fifty years!

And what became of poor Jeremiah who had tried so hard to save the city? He was discovered not far from Jerusalem among the bound captives. Since he had counseled submission, Nebuchadnezzar gave him his choice between going to Babylon or staying behind near the ruined city. He chose to remain in the land that had been his home.

But even now he was not to find the peace for which he longed. Mizpah, five miles south of Jerusalem, was made the seat of government, and Gedaliah appointed governor of the people left in the devastated land. In a few months Gedaliah was assassinated by the leader of a band of marauders who then fled to Egypt, compelling Jeremiah to go with them. We have a glimpse of him pronouncing a doom upon the idolaters in the land of the Nile. And tradition tells us that they silenced his voice by putting him to death. And so the curtain goes down on one of the most tragic lives in history.

The night of Judah has come. The flower of the land are in exile. Anarchy rules among the poor element left behind. One nation has swallowed another, and nothing is left of the glory of Israel. No sadder picture can be imagined than the wreckage which the Chaldeans left of the promised land. In the face of such desolation, who would even dare to hope that Israel should live again and Jerusalem rise from her ruins?

Judah fell, not because of the strength of Babylon, but because of her own inherent weakness. Against all warnings, Jehovah's chosen people insisted upon wrong alliances and persisted in worshiping idols. Wilfully and deliberately she rejected God, and turned to Baal. Her sins continued to multiply until the inevitable end was death. For a hundred years her prophets had proclaimed Judah's downfall, but she gave no heed. She laughed, she scoffed, she derided and persecuted God's chosen messengers, until the very day when the enemy was at her gates. Even then, when all that Jeremiah had predicted was about to be fulfilled, her leaders would not listen to his counsel, but sought to take his life. So she sealed her doom and paid the awful price of death and exile for her sins.

As a nation may we not take warning? Are we not also forgetting God? Spiritual laws cannot be ignored. They are as certain in their operations as the law of gravitation. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Judah sowed to the wind, and reaped the whirlwind. Nothing is surer in this world than that our sins will find us. God's judgments may be delayed, but it is impossible to escape them. They are as inevitable as death.

---

*Blest Land of Judah*

Blessed land of Judah! thrice hallowed of song,
Where the holiest of memories pilgrim-like throng;
In the shade of thy palms by the shores of the sea,
On the hills of thy beauty, my heart is with thee.

With the eye of a spirit I look on that shore,
Where pilgrim and prophet have lingered before;
With the glide of a spirit I traverse the sod
Made bright by the steps of the angels of God.

Oh, the outward hath gone!—but in glory and power,
The spirit surviveth the things of an hour;
Unchanged, undecaying, its Pentecost flame
On the heart's secret altar is burning the same!

—John G. Whittier.

*Class Problems*

1. Describe Jerusalem from without.
2. Tell about David's capture of Ophel. (2 Samuel 5:6-10.)
3. Give an account of the threshing-floor of Araunath.
4. How was Jerusalem captured in 586 B. C.? By whom?
5. What were the sins that led to Judah's national ruin?
6. Will the same sins produce the same results today?
7. How is sin always carrying away into captivity?
8. What finally became of Jeremiah?

LESSON 77

# OBADIAH, THE PROPHET OF HATRED

Lesson Text: Obadiah 1.

Song; Student Reading: Obadiah 1:10-12; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Obadiah 1:15.

Concert Prayer: O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth. Day unto day uttereth speech of thee, and night unto night showeth knowledge. Teach us in this lesson the eternal truth that even though in the pride of their hearts the wicked exalt themselves among the stars, in the end they shall be brought down and humbled to the dust. Thou art a God of righteousness, and thy kingdom and thy glory shall prevail in all the earth. Comfort us with this thought as day by day we contend against the forces of evil. We humbly pray in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Memory Text: Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord.—Obadiah* 1:4.

Explain: 1 Edom. Heathen. 2 Behold, I have made thee small. 6 Things. 7 Brought thee. 11 Thou stoodest on the other side. Forces. 12 Looked on. 14 Crossway. 15 Day of the Lord. 16 All the heathen. Swallow down. 17 Deliverance. 18 Jacob * * * Joseph. For the Lord hath spoken. 20 Sepharad. 21 Saviours. The kingdom shall be the Lord's.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *A Nest Among the Stars*

If you asked the first hundred people you met which was the shortest book in the Bible, ten might answer, "Obadiah." And if you inquired of the ten how many chapters and verses this book contained, one might answer correctly, "one chapter and twenty-one verses." But if you wanted to know what the book contained, it is doubtful whether one of the hundred could tell you. We are going to read this short book today, and when you have read it no doubt you will ask yourself the question, "Why is this little book in the Bible at all?" It consists exclusively of a fiery denunciation of Edom. Somebody has divided Obadiah into three parts. The first is a shriek of rage, the second a shout of defiance, and the third a cry of victory. Why put such a book in the Bible?

We shall try to answer that question in this lesson. But to do so, it will be necessary to go back fifteen hundred years to the beginning of Edom and Israel. You remember the two brothers who lived in Beer-sheba, and how they fell out with each other. Jacob purchased Esau's birthright for a mess of pottage, and later cheated him out of his blessing. This was the beginning of one of the most terrible feuds and frightful hatreds this world has ever known. We have no other record of a family quarrel that was so intense and bitter as that between the descendants of these two brothers. Jacob immediately had to flee for his life, and went to Haran. Twenty years later he returned and met Esau again. The two seemed to become reconciled, but their descendants continued to cultivate a terrible and implacable hatred for each other.

Four hundred years after this, when the children of Israel were coming up through the wilderness to enter the promised land, they came to Edom, east of the Dead Sea, and Moses asked permission to cross their territory, promising not to turn aside from the road, and agreeing to pay for any damage they might do. At the same time he reminded the Edomites that they were brothers, and should be on friendly terms. But the king of Edom bluntly refused, and told Moses that he was ready to go to war with Israel, if any attempt was made to cross his country. So Moses had to go far down to the south, around a range of mountains to the east, and he and the children of Israel suffered untold hardships and spent a great deal of time before they could get around Edom to their destination. The king of Edom gave no explanation for his refusal, but of course it was the old feud that made him so hateful to his kinsmen.

From that time on through all the history of Israel, the most implacable, persistent and hateful of all their enemies was the Edomites. They were not a numerous people, but they were a community of bandits. Their home was among the rocks and crags of Mount Seir. The rock referred to in our text is Petra, which was the central stronghold of the

nation. It is located deep among the mountains and surrounded on all sides with richly covered rocks of matchless beauty and grandeur. One enters the city by a narrow gorge, over a mile long, called the *Sik* or cleft. The chasm is so narrow and deep as to be almost dark at noon day. On emerging from it, the explorer comes into a great hollow basin where were located the dwellings of the ancient Edomites, the ruins of which can still be seen on every hand. Eagles, hawks and mountain birds scream about in this vastness today, just as they did in the days of the Old Testament. The houses resembled wild birds' nests, human eeries, perched upon the high shelves of rocks.

The Edomites never engaged in open warfare, but they made constant forays into the land of Israel when no one was watching, and carried off what plunder they could seize, and fled to their safe retreat before they could be overtaken. They thus became a constant menace not only because of what they stole, but because they took pains to ruin as much property as they could at the same time. Whenever Israel was at war, they invariably assisted her enemies.

In our lesson today we find that Edom has rendered assistance to the Chaldeans in the destruction of Jerusalem, and helped themselves to the spoil. Now they are sitting in their safe retreat rejoicing at Judah's downfall, and boasting: "Who shall bring me down to the ground?" At this point we hear the voice of Obadiah, "Thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down? * * * I will bring thee down, saith the Lord." Then read his hot words of reproach: "You ought not to have come and rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of her destruction. You should not have come into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity and laid hands on their substance, nor stood at the crossroads to cut off those who were trying to escape." Then note at the end, that daring rush of prophecy, where he declares: "Zion shall be exalted, and Edom shall be brought low."

This is hatred, but it is not political hatred. It is the kind of hatred that Nahum manifested against Nineveh. The hatred of Obadiah for the Edomites was profoundly moral and religious. It was the voice of conscience against a people who had no conscience. These two nations lived totally different lives. This difference dated from their parentage. Jacob was religious. Esau was irreligious. He cared nothing for his birthright, had no faith in the future, and no vision of his destiny. This trait he transmitted to his descendants. They became a worldly-minded, shrewd but conscienceless people, living for spoils, plunder and vengeance.

And it was these traits that called forth Obadiah's rage and defiance. In his short prophecy we can read the eternal conflict between righteousness and evil. Every religious soul ought to feel the same way in the face of the Edomites that confront him. Apparently the forces of evil are situated in an impregnable position. They appear to be invincible, and cry out in their pride: "There is no power that can dislodge us, or bring us down." But Obadiah responds: "Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord."

That is faith against pride and conceit. A hundred times Israel had tried and tried again to dislodge this persistent and relentless enemy, and every time they had failed. Now this nation is in exile, Jerusalem has fallen, and to all outward appearances Edom has won the contest. But the prophet's faith is unshaken. The nation that knows not God must fall: "And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Edom: and the kingdom shall be the Lord's."

This is the eternal message of Obadiah: "I will bring thee down, saith the Lord." Let every religious worker take heart, let every true follower of Christ be comforted. The cause they represent cannot fail. The Edoms of today must fall at last, as did the Edom among the crags of Seir. There

may be a hundred attempts and a thousand failures, but the immortal little book of Obadiah sounds for us the trumpet that never knows defeat: "The kingdom shall be the Lord's."

---

*Victor*

To have toiled upward through the barren years,
To have had the courage to contend with wrong;
And walked in silence when the victor's song
Was justly thine, lest it should reach the ears
Of the great grieving host of vanquished ones;
Showing Christ's mercy to the puny soul
That would have kept thee from the longed-for goal—
All these are victories, oh, worthy sons!
But to have battled bravely, and have failed—
Yet failing, stood undaunted to the last,
Cheering the ones who on to victory passed:
Infusing hope to those by doubts assailed,
Conquering self, beneath the chastening rod—
Behold a victor worthy of his God!

—Beth Clater Whitson.

*Class Problems*

1. Tell all you can about Esau and his descendants, the Edomites.
2. Describe the home of the Edomites.
3. Discuss the bitter feud between Israel and Edom.
4. The book of Obadiah is a cry of hatred against the Edomites. Justify such a book in the Bible.
5. Discuss Numbers 20:14-21.
6. What Edoms are bidding defiance to God today?
7. What message does Obadiah bring to us?

LESSON 78

# EZEKIEL, THE PROPHET OF SYMBOLISM

Lesson Text: Ezekiel 3:1-20; 24:15-18.

Song; Student Reading: Ezek. 3:8-9; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Ezek. 3:19.

Concert Prayer: We wait, our Father, for the message and mission for which we came into the world. We stand ready to do thy work and carry out thy will. When the call comes for active service, may we be ready to declare thy word in humility, but without fear or hatred or vindictiveness. Keep us from the sin of silence; and from leaving to others what we should say or do for thee. May the example of thy great prophet Ezekiel in far-off Babylon be a constant inspiration. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee.—Ezekiel 2:1.*

Explain: 3:1 Eat this roll. 3 As honey for sweetness. 4 With my words. 6 People. 7 Impudent. 9 Adamant. 11 Them of the captivity. 12 Behind me. 13 Noise of the wheels. 14 The spirit lifted me. 15 Tel-abib. 18 Die.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *A Forehead of Flint*

We turn back now to accompany the first exiles to Babylon in 597 B. C. You remember that in that company were ten thousand men with their wives and children, the very flower and strength of Judah. In this sad train of exiles walked a young priest named Ezekiel, who later was called of God to become the center of religious life and hope for his banished countrymen in Babylon. He was born about the time when Josiah was pressing his great reforms, after the discovery of the "book of the law of the Lord." Though too young to take part in these reforms, he must have been greatly influenced by them later, and by his personal contact with the great Jeremiah, who ministered in Jerusalem during the whole of Ezekiel's earlier years.

When the exiles reached Babylon, they were permitted to settle in communities of their own, and carry out many of their religious ceremonies without interference. They kept up a correspondence with their relatives in Jerusalem,

and Jeremiah sent a letter advising that they identify themselves with the interests of Babylon for the time being. A strong antipathy, however, grew up between them and the people at home. Those who remained exulted in the calamity which had brought profit to themselves and distress to the exiles. They regarded their brethren as having been driven out for their sins, and felt themselves perfectly secure. On the other hand, the exiles affected the utmost contempt for the plebeians who were carrying things on with a high hand in Jerusalem.

During the first five years of his captivity, Ezekiel was thinking deeply upon the great problem that confronted both branches of his people. Most of the exiles had no idea that Jehovah had dominion over all the earth. The great teachings of the prophets that God controlled the destinies of all nations, and that he ruled in Babylon the same as in Judea, had not been grasped by the great majority. They felt that Jehovah had been unable to protect his own, so their faith was shattered. Others, sensing their sins, sank into a condition of indifferent despondency. We pine away in our transgressions, was their despairing cry. A few, however, could read the solemn lessons of their calamities aright, and clung to the hope that Israel should one day be redeemed and live again.

At the end of five years Ezekiel was ready to receive his call, and God came to him in a great luminous cloud, sweeping from the north, within which were four-winged creatures with faces of men, of lions, of bulls and of eagles. Besides these creatures was a revolving wheel, with another wheel cutting it at right angles. These wheels seemed to be alive with eyes, which symbolized the infinite vision of God. On a great arch, transparent as crystal, supported by the flying creatures, was a throne resembling sapphire. On this throne sat Jehovah in all his radiant glory.

From this majestic personage, Ezekiel received his commission to go forth and proclaim to his people in Babylon a message of counsel and warnng. The divine message

was likened to a roll of parchment which he was commanded to eat, indicating that the word of God would become incarnate in his person. God told him that he was to be a watchman to the house of Israel, to warn his people in Babylon of every danger that threatened. This was to be his responsibility which would cease only when he had exhausted every possible means of impressing them with his divine message. He was warned that the people might reject his testimony, because "all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted." For this reason God said to Ezekiel, "As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house."

God made Ezekiel's forehead "as an adamant harder than flint." That is the kind of man it takes to become a prophet. The poet can dream of music and rhythm, the philosopher can walk in quiet places, brooding over ultimate realities, and even the business man need not be stern and uncompromising; but the prophet must be a fighter, and ready to endure hatred, scourgings and martyrdom. There is no peace for the man who speaks for God. All the hosts of evil are arrayed against him.

During the five years preceding the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel's energies were directed toward stemming the tide of false hopes that threatened to carry Judah into a fatal rebellion against Babylon. He pleaded with his fellow-exiles to use their influence with their kinsmen in Palestine to make them understand that God would not interpose in their behalf again to the Chaldeans. He used all sorts of symbolism to make this clear to his couuntrymen. On one occasion he took a clay tablet and drew a sketch of Jerusalem in a state of siege. Outside he put an iron plate as a symbol of the barrier between God and his people. To further impress them, he lay on his left side for many days as if bound and helpless, in token of the captivity of Israel. Later, he lay on his right side in the same condition to represent the captivity of Judah. To make vivid the horrors of

the siege that threatened Jerusalem, he prepared out of coarse flour unclean food, then baked and ate it in the presence of the people. Another symbol was equally dramatic. He cut off the hairs of his head and beard and divided them into three parts: one part he burned, another he smote with the sword, a third he scattered to the winds. This was to make vivid the fate of Jerusalem. A few of the hairs which were scattered were recovered to represent the survivors of the siege. These were the purified few who should lose their stony hearts, and through much suffering be fitted to participate in God's promises to the nation. All these symbols you may read in detail in the first twenty-four chapters, which deal with Ezekiel's activities before the fall of Jerusalem.

As we read the story of these messengers of God, we see more clearly how badly such men are needed to help us solve the problems of today. Take for example the question of war. Men have been talking about the end of war for centuries. Both Isaiah and Micah spoke of a time when "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Today, we need prophets bold enough to declare that the day for the fulfilment of that prophecy has come. But the prophet who goes up against the militarists, entrenched in their century-old strongholds, must indeed have a forehead of adamant.

Another question is intemperance. Wine and song are woven into our social customs. Bootleggers are taking their places in high society. Like the ancient Edomites, they sit safely in the heights of their crags at Seir, and challenge all the forces of the government to bring them down. We are in sore need of some modern Obadiahs to shake their fists at them and declare: "Though you exalt yourselves as the eagles and make your nest among the stars, you shall be brought to the ground."

Then we have in this land of untold billions of wealth, millions of men today begging for work, while their wives

and children are starving for bread. Some prophet soon must step into the industrial arena, and with the very voice of God declare anew the brotherhood of man. There should be no hunger and cold for those who are willing and able to work. But the prophet who dares to challenge the powers entrenched and protected by unlimited wealth, must pray for the forehead of adamant.

These are only a few of the problems that are pressing for solution. There are many more, and we are in sore need of prophets to solve them.

---

*Carving Our Dream*

Sculptors of life are we as we stand
  With our lives uncarved before us,
Waiting the hour when at God's command
  Our life-dream passes o'er us.
Let us carve that dream in the yielding stone
  With many a sharp incision,—
Its heavenly beauty shall be our own,
  Our lives that angels vision.

—George W. Doane.

*Class Problems*

1. Give an account of Ezekiel's early life.
2. How did he come to go to Babylon?
3. What is meant by symbolism as used in this lesson?
4. Describe Ezekiel's vision when he was called to be a prophet.
5. To whom was he sent and what was his message? (3:4.)
6. How long had Ezekiel brooded over the circumstances and future of his fellow-countrymen? (1:1-3.)
7. Is the power to see visions a lost power? Discuss.
8. What may we learn from this lesson?

LESSON 79

# EZEKIEL, THE PROPHET OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Lesson Text: Ezekiel 24:15-18; 33:1-19.

Song; Student Reading: Ezek. 33:7-9; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Ezek. 33:11.

Concert Prayer: Eternal Father, we realize that there comes to each of us in life a responsibility of influencing the conduct of our associates. We become watchmen to whom men and women look for counsel and warning. Wilt thou give unto us a keen sense of our personal responsibility in this respect. May we realize that no one can live to himself alone. Thou hast no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that they may turn to thee and live. May we become copartners with thee in bringing about the salvation of thy children. And the glory and honor shall all be thine. Amen.

*Memory Text: As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.—Ezekiel* 33:11.

Explain: 7 Watchman. 8 Thou dost not speak. Require at thine hand. 9 Delivered thy soul. 10 Be upon us? 11 Death of the wicked. Turn. Why will ye die? 12 Not deliver him. Not fall. 13 Not be remembered. 14 Shalt surely die. (See Jer. 26:13.) 16 He shall surely live.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Watchman*

As time went on, and Ezekiel noted the disloyalty of Zedekiah to Babylon, he came to realize that there was no hope of saving Jerusalem. His task then was to prepare the exiles for the blow when it came. There was danger that they would turn from Jehovah altogether, and the religion which had been established at such infinite cost would perish from the earth. This made it one of the most critical periods in Hebrew history, and upon Ezekiel rested the great responsibility of impressing the exiles with the fact that when Jerusalem fell it would be because the Lord willed it, not because of his inability to prevent it. The people must be taught that it was a judgment of God, sent upon them because of their terrible sins.

If faith in the God of Israel's great prophets and their

teachings had been lost with the fall of Jerusalem, and the people scattered to mingle among other nations, we tremble to think of what the future history of mankind would have been; for not another nation that flourished before or after that time has given to the world a religion based upon a God of righteousness, justice, mercy and all the attributes that go to make up the Christian conception of God today. That high conception was possible only in a nation where from generation to generation men lived, gifted to know spiritual truth, and willing to suffer and die that others might know the truth also, and learn to live more truly.

Ezekiel's difficulties were not only the natural blindness of the people, but he had to contend with false prophets and pernicious teachers. They were constantly declaring peace for Jerusalem and a speedy return of the exiles to the land of their inheritance. Of course, such teachings would be popular for the time being, and lull to sleep the consciences of those whom Ezekiel tried to awaken to repentance. At times the prophet became discouraged, and cried out that God had nothing more to give a people who had continually rejected him from the time he brought them out of the land of Egypt.

When the siege of Jerusalem began, Ezekiel spoke a parable to the exiles. A great caldron was to be set upon a large fire with choice flesh thrown in to boil for a time, and then to be taken out and rejected. "Woe, to the bloody city," he cried, and urged that wood be heaped on the fire until the very bones be burned. After that, the empty pot itself must be burned and all its filthiness melted till it was purified.

In strange contrast to this dramatic recital is the silent tragedy of the prophet's own domestic affliction. In the morning he announced that his wife should die. Then he went on with his ministry during the day, and in the evening she died; but Ezekiel neither mourned nor wept. He clothed himself as usual the next day, and shed not a single tear. People thought that he was mad; but he explained that their loved sanctuary in Jerusalem was to be profaned,

and their sons and daughters slain in the sacred city. Then they would be compelled to do as he had done, for they would be so stupified with grief that they could shed no tears. It was a vivid picture of the insensibility they should suffer when their nation was dead. Yet even this did not move them.

The story of the watchman and the lesson concerning personal responsibility seem to have occurred just before the news of the fall of Jerusalem reached Ezekiel. He clearly sets forth the responsibilities of the man whose primary duties were to watch for danger, and warn those who were not on their guard. The Israelites were now in a bad situation. The people to whom Ezekiel was speaking were captives and the fall of Jerusalem was imminent. They did not believe this, but it was the prophet's duty as a watchman to warn them.

When the news of the terrible disaster came, and Jerusalem was nothing but an ash heap, they were bitter and inclined to blame their fathers for their misery. In answer to that accusation, Ezekiel gives them the priceless lesson on personal moral responsibility contained in the text. It is a message of cheer. He says God does not want any one to be destroyed; and no one will be, if he desires to be saved. The issues of life and death are in our own hands, and not in the hands of our fathers and mothers. Our destiny is not determined by the acts of our ancestors. Another person's sin cannot condemn us. Salvation is not artificial or inherited. It is a real present state within ourselves.

The principles involved are plain. Past goodness will not cover up present evil deeds. Neither will past evil deeds poison present good deeds. We can make a practical application of this to ourselves. A great many people delude themselves with the thought that some good deed in the past will avail to cover up a present shady transaction. On the other hand, there are those who have truly repented of an evil past, who live in constant fear that the good they are now doing is insufficient to save them because of their past trans-

gressions. To all such, Ezekiel brings this message of comfort. And Jesus also said: "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out."

When the temple in which Israel trusted had fallen and all hope was gone, they cried out in their despair: "Our transgressions and our sins are upon us; how then can we live?" And Ezekiel is ready with his answer that the Lord does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked. His great desire is that they turn from their evil way, and live. And no doubt he reminds them of what he had already taught, that no man is responsible for any sins but his own.

The lesson of today was not only for the people of Ezekiel's time, but for all time. The sense of personal responsibility should be sensed more keenly than it is. Not long ago a business man in a small city was offered $25,000 to go to New York. This was many times as much as he was making in his own business, but he refused the offer. When asked the reason, he replied: "Because scores of my friends have invested in my company. If I go the business will suffer. There is something dearer to me than gold. I shall stay here and build up the business." People trusted him, and he would not disappoint them.

Every person is a watchman. He is looked up to by someone for warning and advice. Let him see to it that he can be trusted. What a delightful world this would be to live in, if everybody could be trusted to do right. There would be no need of policemen or criminal courts. Every man would be a brother and a friend. We would live in peace with all men, and love would rule the world instead of hate. We cannot fully succeed in bringing about this happy state, but each person can be a trusted watchman to all who look up to him, and also heed the warnings and listen to the counsels of the watchmen set over him.

---

*My Creed*

I would be true, for there are those who trust me;
I would be pure, for there are those who care;

I would be strong, for there is much to suffer;
I would be brave, for there is much to dare;
I would be friend to all—the foe—the friendless;
I would be giving, and forget the gift;
I would be humble, for I know my weakness;
I would look up—and laugh—and love and lift.
—Howard Arnold Walter.

*Class Problems*

1. What convinced Ezekiel that Jerusalem would be destroyed?
2. Why would the fall of Jerusalem seriously affect the exiles in Babylon?
3. What is the greatest message of Ezekiel? (Ezekiel 18:4.) Discuss.
4. What is meant by personal responsibility?
5. What can we do to increase the sense of personal responsibility?
6. In what sense are we all watchmen?
7. Are others equally responsible for us as we are for them?
8. What is the message of this lesson to us?

LESSON 80

# EZEKIEL, THE PROPHET OF HOPE

Lesson Text: Ezekiel 34:11-15; 37:1-15; 47:1-9.

Song; Student Reading: Ezek. 34:11-13; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Ezek. 37:12.

Concert Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, in the day of our affliction, when far from our home and friends we sit by the rivers of Babylon and weep for the days that were and are no more, wilt thou send thy prophet to renew within us the light of hope. Give us confidence and strength to wait for thee on the banks of the river that rolls between us and the land of our hopes. And in thine own good time and way bring us safely over once more where our fellowship with thee may be renewed, and our souls restored from the rich pastures that surround the city of God. We humbly pray. Amen.

*Memory Text: By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.—Psalms* 137:1.

Explain: 37:7 A shaking. 9 Wind * * * breath. 11 Cut off for our parts. 13 Graves. 47:1 House. Waters came down. 3 Thousand cubits. 7 Many trees. 8 East country. The sea. Healed. 9 Great multitude.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *A Life-Giving River*

It has been said that where ten men read Isaiah, seven read Jeremiah, while only two read Ezekiel. This does not indicate that Ezekiel's message was less important, but it is because the symbolism he used is difficult for the western mind to understand. It is likely that to those whom he ministered, he made his message more clear and impressive than did the other prophets. To a people acquainted with the symbolic images associated with Babylonian mythology and religion, the beasts, birds, fire, clouds and other illustrations used by Ezekiel, would be not only understood, but vivid and impressive.

Before 586 B. C. his message was pessimistic. "Jerusalem shall fall," was the burden of his cry. After the terrible event happened, and the exiles in Babylon were in the depths of despair, he sounded a new note, "Jerusalem shall rise again." And while that looked impossible, and most of

Gustave Dore'

EZEKIEL PROPHESYING

the people gave little credence to the statement, a number took heart and began to look forward to the fulfilment of his prediction. Even those who did not believe that his words could ever come to pass looked on the prophet with more favor, and he became popular with all classes. A man is always better thought of if he can prophesy of good things to come, than if he has to give warning of judgment and destruction.

We have taken three statements from as many chapters for our text today to illustrate the different symbols used by Ezekiel to make clear the return of the exiles to their own land again. In chapter 34, he likens the children of Israel to sheep that have been scattered among the nations, because their shepherds have been neglectful and have not fed or cared for their flocks as they should have done. In hot indignation the Lord cries out against the rulers of Israel—shepherds who have cared for themselves, but not for the sheep of the flock. Now the Lord himself will be the shepherd and search out his sheep from among the nations, and gather them back to the mountains of Israel once more. There he will feed them, and cause them to lie down in peace.

In chapter 37, Ezekiel found himself in a valley full of dry bones. He walked about among the bones, and was then bidden to prophesy that the Lord would lay sinews upon the bones and cover them with flesh and skin once more. He did as he was commanded, and a great noise followed. The bones came together, bone to its bone, and sinews came upon them; flesh returned and the skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he was told to prophesy to the wind that breath should come to the dead. This he did, and the dead lived again and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army. The bones were the nation of Israel now dead in exile, but God would put his spirit in them, and they should live again and be restored to their own land. Not only should Judah go back, but in this same chapter Ezekiel goes on to say that Ephraim should also return and dwell in the land where their fathers dwelt, and

the two nations become one nation upon the mountains of Israel, and one king should rule over them, as in the days of David.

The most difficult part of our lesson is the verses taken from chapter 47. This is a hard picture for us to follow. Ezekiel is really speaking in this chapter also of the restoration and the glory of Jerusalem, when God's worship is established there once more. His bounty would revive the prosperity of the people, and his kindness would make the homeland lovelier than it had ever been before. It was a wonderful message of hope to give to homesick, unhappy, discouraged people who felt that God had forgotten them, and was punishing them without mercy.

Jerusalem as we know was located on a hill. The city never had enough water in the glorious days before it fell, but now Ezekiel sees a great stream flow from the temple, so large that a mile after it leaves the sanctuary it is too deep to ford. The well-known rocky, barren road from the Holy City down to the Dead Sea is transformed from its barrenness to rich verdure. Both sides of the stream are covered with fruit-bearing trees. The stream gives life to the whole country and even heals the bitter waters of the Dead Sea, so that it teems with fish for man's food.

The meaning of this beautiful picture of peace and plenty is clear, when we study it with care. Not only shall the city of their joy and the temple of their faith be reestablished as in days of old, but they shall become so life-giving that great multitudes besides themselves shall find sustenance there. There will be a vast surplus, an overflow so generous that regions now desolate and barren shall become rich and fruitful.

What a beautiful picture this is of religion as it should be! Knowledge of God blesses him that has it, and he in turn becomes a blessing to others. Ezekiel gives here not only a figure of hope to the lonely exiles in Babylon, but it has been an elixir of life to the desolate and sorrowful through the ages. The figure has been repeated over and over

again. John uses it in his last writing on the isle of Patmos: "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God. * * * " So sure was the prophet of the return of his people to their own land again, that he drew plans and specifications for the city and temple that should rise on the ashes of the old.

The Church of God is a life-giving stream forever extending and growing deeper and deeper. It is like a mighty river spreading and deepening to the sea. The prophet thought of the stream as issuing from the temple and growing in time and space. Not only does it become larger and larger, but its waters remain pure and wholesome. Purity is quite as important as size! Should the stream become polluted, then its life-giving qualities cease. The Christian religion issued from the cross, pure and sweet, and overflowed from the Holy Land into Europe. But as it flowed it became contaminated with the philosophies of Hellenism, and its waters were stained with the pagan customs of Rome and the north. Even today the materialism of our own land is devitalizing the precious faith that Christ committed to his apostles. Men and women are thirsty for the life-giving waters of early Christianity, but sects and creeds have nearly destroyed the health and the beauty of the river of Christ. It is our work and our mission to call men back to the living fountains that came from Calvary.

---

*Imperishable Hope*

Eternal hope! when yonder spheres sublime
Peal'd their first note to sound the march of time,
Thy joyous youth began, but not to fade,
When all thy sister planets have decay'd;—
When wrapt in flames the clouds of ether glow,
And heaven's last thunder shakes the world below,
Thou, undismay'd, shalt o'er the ruins smile,
And light thy torch at nature's funeral pile!

—Thomas Campbell.

*Class Problems*

1. Why do so few people read Ezekiel?
2. What was his message before the fall of Jerusalem? After its fall?
3. Discuss the text taken from Ezekiel 34. From 37.
4. Read carefully Ezekiel 47:1-9; and explain its meaning.
5. Mention other great parabolic teachings of Ezekiel. (15, 16, 17 and 18.)
6. What was the source of the life-giving river? Its course? Effect?
7. Is Chrstianity a healing force in the world? How?
8. What is the message of this lesson to us?

LESSON 81

# ISAIAH, THE PROPHET OF COMFORT

Text: Isaiah 40.

Song; Student Reading: Isa. 40:3-5; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Isa. 40:7-8.

Concert Prayer: We are grateful unto thee, our Heavenly Father, that thou art the friend and comforter of every soul that comes to thee in sorrow and in trust. When all others leave us, thou art still our friend. When other helpers fail and comforts flee, wilt thou abide with us and bring peace to our troubled souls? O Father, help us so to live that we may enjoy the constant companionship of the Comforter which Jesus promised to send to his disciples. Let the beauty of the Lord shine upon us, and establish thou the work of our hands in bringing comfort and joy to others. We ask it in the Savior's name. Amen.

*Memory Text: O God, thou art my God; early I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.—Psalms* 63:1.

Explain: 1 Comfort ye. 2 Warfare. Double. 3 Crieth. 5 Shall see. 6 He said. 7 Spirit. 10 His reward. His work. 24 Shall not. 26 Faileth.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *A New Day for the Exiles*

We come back again now to Isaiah. But this section of the book, beginning with chapter 40, has nothing to do with the previous chapters where the prophet denounced the sins of Judah and foretells the coming doom of Jerusalem. Whether Isaiah, the son of Amoz, who preached and prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, literally saw in vision what should come to pass and wrote a message of comfort to his people who should live one hundred and fifty years in the future, or some one else wrote the remainder of the book that bears his name, is a problem which need not be discussed here. In either case the message of these chapters was intended for the exiles fifty years after the fall of Jerusalem.

It is the darkest hour of the captivity. The prophecies of Ezekiel that Judah should again return to their own land have not yet been fulfilled, and apparently Babylon is as

strong as ever. From all outward appearances there is no hope now that the captives will ever be permitted to return. Then suddenly, as if it had been reserved for this very hour, rings out this voice of comfort and good cheer. The long punishment is nearly over; God has not forgotten his people. Then comes a clarion call to action. Gird yourself! Get ready! God is going to lead you back, not as slaves but as victors. You came in chains with cruel soldiers to beat you when you stumbled, but when you return the Lord will lead you as tenderly as a shepherd leads his sheep to the fold.

How these words must have thrilled the poor despairing exiles! There has been a great deal of denouncing in our lessons, but it has been directed at the hypocrites and those who spoke insincerely. For the sinner who is suffering and repentant there is always a message of comfort and good cheer. "As one whom his mother comforted, so will I comfort you," wrote Isaiah. The Bible condemns sin, but it comforts the sinner and bids him hope.

Perhaps there is no higher function of the preacher than to comfort the unfortunate. And it is astonishing how many there are who suffer or are unhappy. It would be interesting to make a survey of every community to ascertain the number who are sad, broken and discouraged. Outwardly they may appear happy and contented. They laugh and joke while their hearts are breaking. One thousand people commit suicide in New York City every year, and twenty thousand in the United States. This is because they are sick, unhappy or discouraged. When we realize how tenaciously men cling to life, and even the basest criminals count the days and hours before their execution, we can get some idea of how desperate must be the state of mind of those who deliberately take their own lives. There are millions upon millions whose hearts are breaking, that do not go to the extreme of killing themselves. They live on and suffer.

What would these unfortunates not give for a prophet to cry in their ears, "Comfort ye my people," and then point out to them the way of their deliverance. Many are asking the questions that have been asked from generation to generation through all the ages. Does God really care for us? Shall we live on after death? Shall we be judged for the deeds we do? Will righteousness finally prevail? Why do the righteous suffer? These are the things that men want to know, and the prophet who can answer them in a way that will give assurance to the minds of those who have lost faith will have thousands in his audience.

Isaiah made these poor discouraged captives believe in themselves once more. He convinced them that they were greater than their conquerors; that Jehovah was more powerful than all the gods of Babylon. The nations were like the grass that withereth, and the flowers that fade away; but the word that God had spoken would stand forever. Here was a people languishing in the depths of despair, who, when they were asked by their captors to sing one of the songs of Zion, mournfully replied: "How shall we sing the Lord's songs in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy."

Let us try to imagine, if we can, the effect on this despondent people of such words as these: "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!"

Such a statement ringing through the land would transform weakness into strength, and doubt into an invincible faith that would dare all and conquer all opposition. This message was a new elixir of life. It was a trumpet sounding for the resurrection of a nation that was dead. The bones that Ezekiel saw were coming together again, sinews

and flesh and skin were covering them once more, and a new day was beginning to dawn for Israel.

We admire our captains of industry, our successful business men, our inventors of labor-saving machinery, our explorers, our heroes on land and sea and in the air, our students who add to the sum total of human knowledge, our heroes in war and our statesmen; but more to be admired and more needed than any of these are they who can comfort the broken-hearted, replace discouragement with courage, and make then live again whose hopes are dead. It was said of Ezekiel that he was prophet, priest and pastor to his people. No higher tribute could be paid to any man. To speak and act for God and minister to souls that are in need of healing is the highest distinction that mortals in this world can know.

Comfort, good cheer, encouragement, making men do their best—these are the things that are most needed today. Can we give them? Do we care? Have we faith to heal, not the sick in body, but the sick in heart and mind? Do we believe that God is all-powerful and can help us do this? If so, let us go to the sad and sorrowful and do here and now what the ancient prophet did for the exiles. Comfort is one of the world's greatest needs today, as it was in his day, but also it is one of the world's rarest gifts. When sorrow comes most people retire. They close the door and walk away. They do not know what to say, and so they leave the mourner alone. Then it is that the man who walks with God comes and knocks at the door. He comes into their lives. He brings comfort to their souls. He heals them with words that are divine.

---

*The Purest Heaven*

So to live is heaven:
To make undying music in the world,
Breathing as beauteous order that controls
With growing sway the growing life of man.

This is life to come,
Which martyred men have made more glorious
For us who strive to follow. May I reach
That purest heaven, be to other souls
The cup of strength in some great agony,
Enkindle generous ardor, feed pure love,
Beget the smiles that have no cruelty—
Be the sweet presence of a good diffused,
And in diffusion ever more intense.
So shall I join the choir invisible
Whose music is the gladness of the world.

—George Eliot.

*Class Problems*

1. See Matt. 9:22; Acts 9:31; Rom. 15:4; 2 Cor. 1:3; 7:13; Isa. 52:9; 61:2.
2. What was the condition of the exiles when this message of comfort reached them?
3. Which is the higher function of a preacher, to comfort people or to inspire them? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Explain: Isa. 40:7-8 with reference to this lesson.
5. Why is there so much discouragement and sorrow in the world?
6. Who is responsible for this condition? Discuss.
7. What can be done to overcome discouragement?
8. Read Isa. 40:3. How may we prepare the way of the Lord?

LESSON 82

# ISAIAH, THE PROPHET OF VICARIOUS SUFFERING

Lesson Text: Isaiah 53.

Song; Student Reading: Isa. 53:3-4; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Isa. 53:5.

Concert Prayer: Most merciful Father, on this new day in our lives we pause to remember all the suffering it has cost to reveal thy character and attributes to the world. Thy name has been glorified among men by the heroes and martyrs who have lived and died for thy name's sake. Make us worthy of the glorious heritage they have left us. And if like thy prophets of old we are called to suffer for the truth, help us to bear with patience and courage the burdens put upon us. May we be faithful witnesses for thee wherever we go. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

*Memory Text: He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.—Isaiah* 53:5.

Explain: 1 Our message. 2 Before him. A tender plant. 3 He was despised. 5 Chastisement of our peace. 8 Taken from prison. 9 He made * * * because. Rich. 10 Yet it pleased. Offering for sin. 11 His knowledge. 12 Divide the spoil.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Rejected of Men*

This is the most glorious chapter in the Old Testament; a golden treasury of written words that have brought comfort and peace to countless millions of God's suffering children. Running through the last chapters of Isaiah like a thread of gold is a series of passages in which the term "servant of Jehovah" is used. At first the servant seems to refer to the nation of Israel as a whole, then it is the loyal portion of Israel that is to be a light to the Gentiles. Next it is a symbolic individual, and finally in this chapter there seems to be no question but that the portrait of a real person is intended; one whose visage is marred, and who is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief, by whose stripes mankind is to be healed.

Isaiah is here introducing his people to one of the greatest truths of life. All human progress has been brought about by suffering. Every good that we enjoy has come through blood and tears. The prophet wanted the unhappy exiles to know that their captivity in Babylon would not be without its compensations, both to themselves and to others. When the days of their captivity were over and they were at liberty to go and come as they pleased, a knowledge of the true God would be taken to all parts of the world, and so the promise made to Abraham that his seed should bless all nations would be fulfilled.

As a nation, then, they had blessed the world through suffering, and this was true also of individuals. The suffering servant was a picture of the prophets of Israel. They were despised, rejected of men and often slain. Through their stripes Israel had been healed and purged from her sins, and saved as a nation. Without them there would have been no nation, only a little group of tribes that could never have been a blessing to the world.

Out of the night of the exile then came blessings untold. They did not see at once that it was the road to salvation, but still dreamed of a temporal kingdom that should subdue all other kingdoms and rule the world from Jerusalem. Not until five hundred years later when one was born in Bethlehem, who went up to Jerusalem and there lived out in every detail the picture of the suffering servant, was rejected and put to a cruel death, was established by his life and death the immortal truth which Isaiah had proclaimed, that salvation came through suffering. He glorified the cross, which had been a symbol of shame and punishment, for all ages to come, by making it the symbol of hope and redemption.

The great truth of the efficacy of vicarious suffering in bringing salvation was perfectly demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus Christ, but it may be seen also to a degree in all who have been willing to suffer for others. The pages of history are written over with this great truth, that civilization itself owes all that it has achieved to those who have

been despised and rejected—men of sorrow and suffering. This holds true in every line of human endeavor. All new truth has been paid for with the axe and gibbet and cross.

What a heritage our generation enjoys when we stop to think about it! First, there is our "home of the brave and land of the free," where we have a voice in determining the policy of the government under which we live, and the privilege of worshiping God according to the dictates of our own consciences. These have come to us through sufferings untold and martyrs unnumbered, who voluntarily placed their lives on the altars of sacrifice to purchase with their blood these inestimable blessings.

Then there are a thousand and one comforts and conveniences that we enjoy. Such homes as never were dreamed of before, filled with appliances that eliminate drudgery and make for joy, health and contentment, are within the reach not only of the rich but the poor as well. Our schools, books, musical instruments, newspapers, automobiles, radios, telephones, playgrounds, showhouses and machinery of all kinds to do our work, all have come to us out of suffering, poverty, starvation and death.

Every road we travel, every bridge we cross, every acre of land reclaimed, every church in which we worship, every postoffice in which we get our mail, every schoolhouse where we go to learn, every court house where justice is administered, from one end of our great nation to the other, has come to us as the result of hardships and sufferings.

But the greatest sacrifice of all was made by him who suffered and died to give us the Christian religion. That is why it is so precious. Words fail us when we try to give adequate expression to the gratitude we owe to him who "was despised and rejected of men," and with whose "stripes we are healed." The kingdoms and empires we have been reviewing, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Midian, Moab, Ammon, Edom, and even Israel, were founded on force, and lost. Jesus alone founded his Kingdom on love, and won. When we come to know it better, the life of Christ will thrill

us through and through. He was "the mightiest among the holy, the holiest among the mighty. He lifted with his pierced hands empires off their hinges, turned the stream of centuries out of its channel, and still governs the ages."

In our day it is becoming popular to argue against the Christian religion. Infidels scoff at the humble follower of the man from Nazareth, who testifies that he is saved through his atonement, but they cannot laugh away the effects of that atonement as seen in lives renewed and raised from sin to righteousness. The life of Christ has baffled the skeptics from the first century down to the twentieth. We stand in awe and humble reverence in his presence. We ponder the gracious words that fell from his lips, and marvel that men will try to make them commonplace. Heaven and earth may pass away, but the words of Jesus are eternal. The world has never caught up with his teachings and never will. But we may enjoy the benefits of his life and death to the extent that we also suffer vicariously to bless and uplift mankind.

---

*Sorrow*

Let no man pray that he know not sorrow,
  Let no soul ask to be free from pain,
For the gall of today is the sweet of tomorrow;
  And the moment's loss is the lifetime's gain.
Through want of a thing does its worth redouble,
  Through hunger pangs does the feast content,
And only the heart that has harbored trouble
  Can fully rejoice when the joy is sent.
Let no man shrink from the bitter tonics
  Of grief, and yearnings, and care, and strife,
For the rarest chords in the soul's harmonics
  Are found in the minor strains of life.

—Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

*Class Problems*

1. Read Isaiah 53. What impresses you most in this chapter?
2. In what way does Jesus make up the picture of the suffering servant?
3. What character in the Old Testament most nearly corresponds to the suffering servant? Why?
4. Name other characters who have been suffering servants.
5. Why are prophets not appreciated by their own generation?
6. What is meant by vicarious suffering?
7. Discuss this statement: "By their sacrifices ye shall know them."
8. In what way may we become suffering servants?

LESSON 83

# DANIEL, THE PROPHET OF TEMPERANCE

Lesson Text: Daniel 1.

Song; Student Reading: Dan. 1:8; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Dan. 1:20.

Concert Prayer: O Lord, we thank thee for all those who have dared to stand for their ideals and faith even from the days of their youth. May we become more like them—fearless, loyal and zealous for thee. Reveal to us the source of their courage and strength and help us to cultivate these moral qualities. Thou hast made us in thine own image and likeness. We pray that we may never debase that image by indulgence and sin, but stand firm and immovable in the face of all the forces and temptations that would degrade and destroy our souls. Amen.

*Memory Text: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.—Isaiah* 40:31.

Explain: 2 His god. 3 The king's seed * * * princes. 4 Children. Blemish. Science. Learning. Chaldeans. 5 Meat. Stand before the king. 6 Children of Judah. 8 Defile himself. 10 Your sort? 12 Pulse. 17 Daniel had understanding. 20 Magicians. Astrologers. 21 First year of king Cyrus.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Building a Life*

Being good has been defined as doing what we will be glad we did about twenty years afterwards. A great many people who are forty or fifty years old have regrets. They are sorry for certain things they did when they were young, that ever after stood in the way of their success. Daniel and his friends did not make this mistake. When they refused to drink wine and eat certain kinds of meat that were prohibited by the law of Moses, it must have seemed very foolish to their companions who were in training. These young men had been highly honored. The king had selected them from thousands of captives to receive a special course of instruction. If they proved capable and worthy, they would one day be numbered among the wise men of Babylon, and become the counselors of the great Nebuchadnezzar. Surely, it appeared foolish for them to

jeopardize their future prospects by raising an issue on a matter so trifling. They were far from home, slaves really, in a foreign land; why let a question of a little wine and meat stand in the way of their advancement to honor and distinction?

But to these young men there was something more important than honors in Babylon. They had certain principles of conduct by which they proposed to govern their lives. Their religion was very dear to them. Perhaps in far-off Jerusalem were the mothers who had cautioned them not to defile themselves among the Chaldeans. Better suffer punishment and disgrace, than eat food that their religion condemned as unclean. They must be loyal to their principles at any cost.

But notice also that Daniel was tactful. Some people are so untactful in their conscientiousness, that they become offensive in their zeal to show how different they are from other people. Daniel avoided that mistake. He took the prince who had charge of his education aside and asked permission for himself and friends to have the meat and wine left out of their menu. The prince objected on the ground that the king who had provided the meat and drink for their daily diet would see the ill effects of a poorer fare in their weakened condition, and so perhaps endanger his life to the king.

To off-set this objection Daniel said: "Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give up pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat; and as thou seest, deal with thy servants." How tactful that was! No offense could be taken at such a request, and the prince readily agreed.

Not only did Daniel and his friends show loyalty and tact, but a high degree of courage as well. "Moral courage," we call it. They were not afraid to put God's promises to the test. These young men were willing to be ex-

amined physically and mentally as to the result of their moral convictions. And how wonderfully they were vindicated! We read: "And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat." Better even than this is the following: "As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom." And when their education was completed this wonderful tribute is paid to these Jewish boys who had been loyal to the ideals of their faith: "And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm."

The statement is often made by those who would tempt young people to violate the high ideals of their faith, "You are only young once, don't miss anything." That sounds attractive, and many fall for it only to find when it is too late that they have paid a high price for the pleasures of a day. We should plan at least for a life of seventy years. What folly it is to put all our eggs in the one basket of youth, and give no thought to the years when youth is gone! Not only the word of God, but the experience of our race through all the ages clearly shows that the young men who are successful in life and who are remembered, are fellows of the Daniel type.

Frazer, in his book called "The Golden Bough," tells of a custom in ancient Rome to select one handsome young man like Daniel, without blemish, and make a hero of him for the great festival of Saturn, the god of seed-time and harvest. For thirty days this youth was granted every indulgence. No one was permitted to refuse him any physical desire. He could drink and carouse to his heart's content. Even these modern advocates of unrestricted license for young men and women would have to admit that he "missed nothing." The choicest wines were his for the asking; all moral restraints were removed, and he could gratify every lustful desire for one short month. Then on the high day of

the festival, he went up to the altar of Saturn and cut his own throat, allowing his life's blood to run down over the altar.

So do many men and women of today sacrifice their lives to the god of pleasure. They live merrily and fast for a time, and later learn to their sorrow that they have shut themselves out from the kingdom where honor and high service awaited them. How different it was with Daniel and his friends, who in the days of their youth laid the foundation for years of achievement and distinction! We read in the last verse of our text, "And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus." Sixty years after he completed his education at the court of king Nebuchadnezzar his star was still in the ascendant. And during all those years he really "missed nothing" that went on in the kingdom. He took an active part in great world movements, was the friend and counselor of kings, interpreter of dreams, and a prophet of God. Such honor and such richness of life could never have been his, had he not restrained his appetites, and exercised self-control in his youth. He did not yield to temptation. Others drank, but he did not indulge. His companions at court might go out and have a gay time at night, while he remained in his room and built up his manhood. The result was he made for himself a great life, a wonderful character, a man "ten times better" in wisdom than the wisest men in Babylon. We can have a short life and a merry one while it lasts, or a long life and an honored one, like that of Justice Holmes of the Supreme Court, who is still going strong at the end of ninety years. The choice is with us.

---

*Building Character*

We are building every day
In a good or evil way,
And the structure as it grows
Will our inmost soul disclose,

Till in every arch and line
All our faults and failings shine:
It may grow a castle grand,
Or a wreck upon the sand.
Do you ask what building this
That can show both pain and bliss,
That can be both dark and fair?
Lo, its name is character!
Build it well whate'er you do!
Build it straight and strong and true!
Build it clean and high and broad!
Build it for the eye of God!

*Class Problems*

1. What definition of goodness is given in this lesson? Discuss it.
2. What training was decided upon for the four Israelite captives?
3. What experiment did Daniel make? With what results?
4. In what way did Daniel show both loyalty and tact?
5. In what way did Daniel and his friends show courage?
6. What temptations are there for us to violate the ideals of our religion?
7. Discuss this statement: "Life is not a picnic, but a crusade."
8. How is faith a source of strength?
9. What application can we make of this story of Daniel?

## Lesson 84

# BELSHAZZAR, THE PROUD AND IMPIOUS KING

Lesson Text: Daniel 5.

Song; Student Reading: Dan. 2:44; Prayer; Concert Reading: Dan. 3:17-18.

Concert Prayer: O God, give us wisdom in dealing with success. Should prosperity and earthly honors come to us in life, wilt thou keep us humble. Men are inclined to boast of their own achievements as if in and of themselves they had done great things. O Lord, save us from such folly. May we ever have before us the example of our Savior, the Lord of heaven and earth, who took upon himself the form of a servant and ministered to the least among thy children. Help us to remember always that all we have and are comes from thee, and in and of ourselves we can do nothing. The glory and honor be thine forever. Amen.

*Memory Text: Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*—1 *Peter* 5:5.

Explain: 1 Belshazzar the king. 2 Vessels. His father Nebuchadnezzar. 7 Be the third ruler. 12 Hard. 13 Jewry? 17 Rewards to another. 19 Slew * * * kept alive.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Folly of Pride*

What a dramatic story this is and how true to life! Here is a man drunk with unearned power, who could not resist the temptation to show off. Every restraint was removed, and Belshazzar felt strong enough to insult God. He and his dissolute companions dared to drink their liquor from the sacred vessels which had been taken from the temple at Jerusalem. This impious king thought himself able to flout the king of heaven, and did it.

In the midst of their wild revelry came the unknown handwriting, its message of doom, but in a language which none of the wise men of Babylon could read. In his fear and despair the guilty king called on Daniel for help. This good man had stood through all the years of his life as the impersonation of righteousness. The prophet was promised great honor and power in the kingdom, if he could in-

terpret the writing on the wall. Daniel scorned any reward that the king could bestow upon him: "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another," he said; "yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation."

With what consternation must the proud monarch have heard the words: "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." We can imagine the terror-stricken revelers fleeing in every direction for safety—surely pride goeth before a fall. Belshazzar had committed a deadly wrong, and this was the penalty. When a man gets the idea that he can defy God, and give free rein to every evil appetite and passion, his days are numbered.

The tragic story of Belshazzar is meant for all, and is a warning to all. We need only look about us to bring the lesson down to date. Every newspaper tells the story of some noted man or woman who has gone to pieces upon the rock of success, followed by pride and a sense of power. A man that is ripe in pride, is near the end of the road, without having accomplished anything of lasting good. When the Master made the startling declaration that he who would be the greatest among his disciples must become the servant of all, the statement seemed foolish to those who heard it. But human experience has proved it true. Humility and service have led to greatness, while pride and selfishness have led to destruction.

People are proud for many reasons. Some who have been blessed with a perfect body, are proud of their physical strength and beauty. But how little that counts in the long run. It is ours for a moment, and then fades like the flowers of spring. It neither adds to nor takes away from our manhood or womanhood. Whether we are five feet or six feet tall makes little difference when we go out and look at the stars. Could we see the dust of those who lived a hundred years ago, we would be slow to boast of any physical attractions we may have.

Then there are those who brag about their superior intelligence. They are proud of their exceptional talents and genius. They have better minds, better memories, greater will power, and special capacity for deep and long sustained thinking. How such people sometimes look down on those whose intelligence is of a lower order! But even the best minds come far short of solving our ordinary social and economic problems, to say nothing of the mighty problems of the universe. We are all little children when it comes to knowledge. The greatest thinkers of the world, like Sir Isaac Newton, may pick up a few pretty pebbles here and there, but the great ocean of truth still lies unexplored.

Then there are those who are possessed of great wealth, who think that they should be set apart from the common crowd, because, forsooth, their clothes are a little more costly and their food a little richer. How foolish! A single hour may sweep away all their material possessions and leave them stranded. Or, some physical infirmity may overtake them, that all their wealth cannot remove. Belshazzar one night owned the wealth of a kingdom, the next morning he had neither a kingdom nor a place among the living.

Still others pride themselves on their political, religious or social connections. They have influence and what is called "pull." They move in the higher circles of society; they mingle with the elite; they are always present at the highest social functions. And they are lifted up because of these advantages. But what do all these things amount to so far as permanent values are concerned? All this is transitory and on the surface. It counts for little in the final analysis of the elements that go to make a successful and happy life.

There are even those who are proud because they think they are better than other people. We see them all around us, men and women, who, like the ancient Pharisee, thank God that they are not like their neighbors, who have this, that and the other fault. Poor blind souls, they forget that

all have sinned, themselves included, and are in sore need of forgiveness.

Oh, how foolish it is to be proud! Soon all will be brought down to the dust. The high and the low, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, will find a common level in the grave.

" 'Tis the wink of an eye, 'tis the draught of a breath
From the blossom of health to the paleness of death,
From the guilded saloon to the bier and the shroud,
Oh! why should the spirit of mortal be proud."

Every day the Angel in King Robert of Sicily is asking each of us the question: "Art thou the king?" Shall we, like King Robert in the days of his pride, lift our foreheads higher, and fling the haughty answer back: "Yes, I am, I am the king?" Or, shall we bow down our heads and meekly answer him, as Robert did when he was humbled, "Thou knowest best?" The first answer arrays us against God's eternal laws, and it will break us if we persist; the other means that we are in harmony with God's great plan of salvation, and willing to enter his kingdom as little children. One answer means failure and sorrow, the other means success and happiness. One means defeat and death, the other means victory and everlasting life.

Belshazzar stands for a type that is all too common. We meet him everywhere, in every town, and in every age. A little money or a little power, or perhaps a little learning, has been sufficient to turn his head. How strange it is that men cannot learn by the sad experiences of others. But the tragedy of the Babylonian king continues. Men get inflated ideas of their own greatness and importance. They become conceited and lifted up in pride, and then they fall. Like Belshazzar, they are weighed in the balance, and found wanting. They forget God and trust in their own strength, and then their days are numbered. But the truly great souls, the Jeremiahs, the Ezekiels and the Daniels, are not thinking of themselves or boasting of their own greatness. They are too busy serving humanity to consider their own fame

or glory. Like little children in humility they walk among the poor and the lowly to bless and to save, while, if need be, they dare to stand in the presence of kings and denounce their sins. Such a man was Daniel.

---

*Fall of Belshazzar*

Belshazzar is king! Belshazzar is lord!
And a thousand dark nobles all bend at his board;
Fruits glisten, flowers bloom, meats steam, and a flood
Of the wine that man loveth runs redder than blood:
Wild dancers are there, and a riot of mirth,
And the beauty that maddens the passions of earth.
"Bring forth," cries the monarch, "the vessels of gold,
Which my father tore down from the temple of old;
Bring forth and we'll drink, while the trumpets are blown,
To the gods of bright silver, of gold, and of stone:
Bring forth!"—and before him the vessels all shine,
And he bows unto Baal, and he drinks the dark wine.
What cometh?—look, look! Without menace or call?
Who writes with the lightning's bright hand, on the wall?
What pierceth the king, like the point of a dart?
What drives the cold blood from his cheek to his heart?
"Chaldeans! magicians! the letters expound!"
They are read—and Belshazzar is dead on the ground!

*Class Problems*

1. Is there any excuse for pride at any time or in any place?
2. Name the sins of which Belshazzar was guilty.
3. What was his greatest sin? Why?
4. Do intemperance and irreligion go together? Discuss.
5. Is alcohol an enemy of the soul? Why?
6. Enumerate the things that lead to pride.
7. Do you think that a proud man can be saved? Why?
8. There was one bright spot in Belshazzar's character. Name it.

## Lesson 85

# DANIEL, THE PROPHET OF PRAYER

Lesson Text: Daniel 6.

Song; Student Reading: Daniel 6:10; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Daniel 6:26.

Concert Prayer: Eternal Father, we praise thy holy name. From everlasting to everlasting thou art the same. We thank thee that the faith of Daniel may be our faith, and his devotion and loyalty to thee may live again in us. May we, like him, open our windows and pray. Let no fear of man or feebleness of purpose prevent us from the blessed privilege of communing with thee. We need thy constant fellowship. Make us worthy to walk with thee by day, and in the night time wilt thou not forsake us. We humbly pray. Amen.

*Memory Text: And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.—Daniel* 12:3.

Explain: 1 Princes. 2 Was first. 7 Governors * * * captains. 8 Medes and Persians. Which altereth not. 10 The writing. Toward Jerusalem. He did aforetime. 11 Praying. 12 Ask a petition of. 14 Displeased with himself. 17 Own signet. 18 Instruments of music. 23 Believed. 26 Every dominion.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Open Window*

The story of Daniel in the lions' den was a Sunday School lesson. The teacher's description of the den and hungry lions was so vivid and realistic that her pupils listened with breathless interest. However, when she got to the last part, where king Darius came in the morning and to his great joy found Daniel unharmed, they seemed very much disappointed. The teacher was greatly surprised at this, and asked the reason. One bright little fellow answered for the class: "Why, Miss Jones, the hungry lions didn't get anything to eat after all." The pupils were more concerned about the hunger of the lions, than they were about the safety of the prophet.

We shall try in this lesson to transfer the interest from the hungry lions to the brave, loyal, prayerful

servant of God. The story is wonderfully true to human nature. Whenever a man is diligent and faithful and has greater ability than others, his associates are always ready to pounce upon him and do all in their power to crush him. In this case Daniel had incurred the jealousy and ill-will of his fellow officials, because the king recognized his superior qualities and had put him ahead of the others. So they put their heads together to plan a way of getting rid of one who had passed them in the path of honor. Anything that could be made to serve their purpose would do; and because his religion was different, they decided to make that the basis of their attack.

Since the king was favorable to Daniel, the unscrupulous plotters had to make him a victim also. This was easily done because, while he was a well-meaning man, he had one great weakness common to so many—egoism and pride. By flattering his vanity, they could accomplish their purpose. We saw in our last lesson that conceit and pride are really deadly sins. They invariably push us in the wrong direction. Had the king been more humble and not so easily flattered, he would not have endangered the life of one so dear to him as Daniel.

The wicked plotters knew the religious steadfastness of Daniel, and were convinced that if they could persuade the king to accept the position of a god, the prophet would refuse to worship him. They therefore prepared a decree that whosoever should ask a petition of any other god or man than the king for thirty days should be cast into the den of lions. Darius, flattered by so high a compliment, and without the least suspicion of their plot, signed it readily enough. Had he been less vain and more humble, he would never have fallen into such a trap; but his stupid egoism brought an innocent man to death's door.

As the schemers had foreseen, the plot worked to perfection. While Daniel had a high regard for the king, he drew the line when it came to accepting him as his God. As soon as he learned that the new law "was signed, he went into his house; and, his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."

The result was, that much to the regret of the king Daniel was condemned and cast to the lions. His enemies insisted that the law must be enforced; and while Darius saw when it was too late that it was only a plot to get rid of his loyal officer, there was nothing he could do to save him; because a Persian law, once enacted, could not be revoked. But if the king could do nothing, God could, and he intervened to save his faithful servant, while the wicked intentions of the plotters returned like a boomerang on their own heads. They themselves were condemned by the king to suffer the death they had intended for Daniel.

In this story God's prophet is saved from a cruel death, but that does not always happen. A few hundred years later, unnumbered Christians were cast to the lions in the Roman coliseum, and perished. Jesus himself, though he prayed that death on the cross might pass him by, was not spared. In the third chapter of Daniel we have an account of the heroism of Daniel's three companions, who were commanded to bow down and worship a great golden image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up. They said to the king: "Be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." As a result, they were cast into a fiery furnace, seven times hotter than it was usually heated. In that case also God intervened to save them. But thousands of martyrs have died in the flames. When the executioner went behind St. Jerome to set fire to the pile, the martyr said, "Come here and kindle it before my eyes; for

if I dreaded such a sight, I should never have come to this place when I had a free opportunity to escape." The fire was kindled, and he then sang a hymn which was soon finished by the encircling flames.

Through prayer and faith God may intervene to save some of his servants from martyrdom, but he intends that many shall die for their faith. "In the blood of the martyrs lies the seed of the Church." That statement is eternally true. No matter how much a man seems to be needed on earth, if he dies in a great cause he is ten times more potent than if he had lived. But we must not take death too seriously, because it is not as final as many seem to think. To the man with faith in immortality, it is but a passing from one room into another. All men must pass through it; and whether it comes soon or late makes little difference, so long as we are in the line of our duty and prepared for it when it comes.

We study about these old-time heroes, not because we expect to have their experience in fiery furnaces and dens of lions, but to develop fortitude for trials of our own. Into every life there come dark days and times of hardship. These come to each of us in different ways. But they are sure to arrive sooner or later; sickness, financial losses, misunderstandings and vacant chairs in our homes, come without warning. We need at such times to remember those who have stood unmoved amid the storms of life, sustained by an unfaltering faith that never wavered. It is worth while at such times to have our window opened toward the city of God, from whence comes our strength. All these heroes of the faith knew how to pray. They not merely said their prayers as so many of us do; they really met someone, and often wrestled with God until he blessed them. With that blessing as their shield, they knew no fear.

*Prayer*

"Lord, what a change within us one short hour
Spent in thy presence will avail to make!
What heavy burdens from our bosoms take;
What parched grounds refresh, as with a shower!
We kneel, and all around us seems to lower;
We rise, and all the distant and the near
Stands forth in sunny outline, brave and clear!
We kneel, how weak! We rise, how full of power!
Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,
Or others, that we are not always strong;
That we are ever overborne with care;
That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled, when with us is prayer,
And joy and strength and courage are with thee?"

---

*Class Problems*

1. Name each story in the first six chapters of Daniel.
2. What lessons do we learn from Daniel in the lions' den?
3. What was the great fault of Darius?
4. Discuss verse ten.
5. What lions' dens await the men who speak for God today?
6. Give a good definition of prayer.
7. What is the difference between "saying prayers" and praying?
8. Why do people kneel when they pray? Is it necessary?

## Lesson 86

# ZERUBBABEL, THE LEADER IN A NEW DAY

Lesson Text: Ezra 1:1-8; 3:10-13; Zechariah 4:6-10.

Song; Student Reading: Psalms 126:1-3; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Psalms 126:4-6.

Concert Prayer: Gracious Lord, let our hearts overflow with gladness, for thou hast done great things for us. Our souls are refreshed from living fountains, and we have been made to walk in pleasant places. Help us to see that all our petty troubles and anxiety over little things are far outweighed by thy manifold blessings. O Father, words fail us when we try to express our gratitude, but thou knowest our inmost thoughts. Our hearts are set on thee, and our desires are to serve thee and keep thy commandments. Like Israel of old, we sing a song of thanksgiving and call on all to witness and share our joy. Amen.

*Memory Text: He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.—Psalms* 126:6.

Explain: Ezra 1:1 Now. First year of Cyrus. Lord stirred. 2 Hath given me. 4 Whosoever remaineth. Men of his place. 5 Whose spirit. 8 Sheshbazzar. 3:12 Wept. 6:14 Artaxerxes. 15 Adar. The sixth year.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Returning with Joy*

In the year 538 B. C., Cyrus the great of Persia conquered Babylon, and ascended the throne of the great Nebuchadnezzar. During the first year of his reign, he issued a proclamation that as many of the captive Jews as desired to do so, were at liberty to return to their own land and rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Those of their people who did not desire to return were asked by Cyrus to help the exodus of the others with money and goods and with animals, besides free-will offerings for the house of God. It is estimated that about fifty thousand Jews, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, who was of royal descent, took advantage of the opportunity. In this group were a great number

who had been among the exiles forty-eight years before.

It is perhaps impossible for us to estimate the joy and bewilderment that must have come to them when it was made known that they were to return. It would be like opening the doors of a prison, and telling the inmates that they were at liberty to go home. We can see them moving out from the gates of Babylon, with waving of hands and kisses and prayers of loved ones left behind. In the background were the crowds of Babylon, who must have been filled with wonder and applauded the loyalty of these people to their homeland. They had been true to the sentiment of their song, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning." Now, the refrain of a new song rang out over the plains of Chaldea, "The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad."

Of course, to the millions of people who dwelt in the fertile valley of Mesopotamia this little side drama seemed a small affair. Fifty thousand more or less in population was of little consequence. These captives were leaving a rich and brilliant city and moving to a desolate and poverty-stricken land, where nothing had been produced for fifty years. It looked foolish even to some of their fellow-exiles to leave the fertile fields and growing prospects in their new homes, where, under the liberal Cyrus, they might enjoy all the advantages of citizenship, for the barren hills of Judah. But life was in that small caravan, as in a mustard seed. The hopes and dreams of future ages went with that little company of Jewish patriots to their old home. Glorious Babylon, with its hanging gardens and magnificent palaces, has disappeared; but the spiritual ideals that went out from its gates that day still live. Even the Jews who remained passed out of the picture of history,

while they that gave up their life of ease, comparative wealth and security to embark on this spiritual adventure are numbered among the immortals.

The captivity had not been without its benefits. Jehovah had become to them as the prophets long before had declared—a universal God—and we hear no more of their bowing down to gods made with hands. Idolatry had passed out of the life of Israel forever. These Jews had also gained immeasurably in culture. New values had entered into their lives, and they had dropped many of their pagan notions. During this long period of suffering and persecution, their faith had become more real to them, and they returned more like a modern religious community, with priests who led them and scribes who taught them. But best of all, the captivity had separated the wheat from the tares. Those who had the faith and courage to return and rebuild the temple and ruined cities, were without question the choicest souls among them. The weak and worldly-minded drifted into the cults of Babylon, and forgot the true God. This was a great gain to the remainder. Every institution needs to be purged now and again, that the tares may be burned and the wheat garnered.

A sad sight greeted them when they reached Judea. Jerusalem lay in ruins, with broken walls, the temple gone, no homes, not even an altar, nothing to remind them of the glory that once adorned the sacred site. But with stout hearts they began to build homes again, set up an altar, and planned the all-important matter of rebuilding the temple. With these people patriotism and religion were closely interwoven. We, with our separation of church and state, can hardly imagine the strength of the sentiments and emotions that grew out of that fact. When we separate our patriotic and religious emotions, both are weakened. The union of

religion and government is normal, but it does not work well unless those in charge are spiritual. Since that is not often the case, the union where it has been attempted has worked to the disadvantage of religion. That was the chief difficulty in both the Kingdoms of Israel. The kings were generally worldly-minded, and so religion suffered. Samuel foresaw and predicted just that condition, when Israel demanded a king.

But in the beginning of the new commonwealth in Judea the church and state were one, and all the people were intensely religious. That will help us to understand the profound emotions that were awakened by the laying of the foundation of the new temple. Such intense feelings had not been aroused since the exiles looked back and saw their city burning to ashes, a half century before. There were majestic instrumental music, trained choirs, liturgy of the most impressive kind, and the people were not restricted in the matter of applause.

One human touch is given by Ezra to the proceedings that cannot fail to awaken our own emotions. While the young men who had been born in Babylon and had never seen Jerusalem before shouted for joy, the older men who recalled the glory of Solomon's temple wept aloud. In their poverty they could never replace the building which David had saved for, and the great Solomon had built. Gone also was the sacred Ark with its tablets of stone, its pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, with all the cherished memories that clustered around it. No, it could never be the same to the old men again. We can easily appreciate and sympathize with the tears they shed, when they remembered the glory that had departed from Israel.

So amid weeping and rejoicing, music and song, the chanting of priests and shouts of the people, the foundation of a new temple was laid over the ruins of the old,

and a new day had dawned for Judah. The captivity was over. The Jews, purified and chastened, could come again to the holy place where their fathers worshiped, and hold aloft once more the torch of spiritual enlightenment to a world that sat in darkness. The vision of Ezekiel was about to be fulfilled, a river of life would flow from that center that should one day quench the thirst of all nations.

---

*A New Year*

"I saw on the hills of the morning
The form of the New Year arise;
He stood like a statue adorning
The world with a background of skies;
There was courage and grace in his beautiful face,
And hope in his glorious eyes.
"I come from time's boundless forever,"
He said with a voice like a song,
"I come as a friend to endeavor,
I come as a foe to all wrong;
To the sad and afraid, I bring promise of aid,
And the weak I will gird and make strong.
I bring you more blessings than terrors;
I bring you more sunshine than gloom;
I tear out your page of old errors;
I hide them away in Time's tomb;
I reach you clean hands, and lead to the lands,
Where the lilies of peace are in bloom."

*Class Problems*

1. In what way was Cyrus an instrument of God?
2. What were the benefits of the captivity to the Israelitish nations?

3. What part did the Jews who remained play in the return?
4. Who was the leader of the return?
5. Why was the rebuilding of the temple so important?
6. Why are religious buildings necessary?
7. Tell about the laying of the foundation of the new temple.
8. What part of the captives rejoiced? What part wept? Why?
9. What advantages are there in a union of church and state? Disadvantages?

LESSON 87

# HAGGAI, THE PROPHET OF TEMPLE BUILDING

Lesson Text: Haggai 1; 2:1-4; Ezra 4:1-6.

Song; Student Reading: Haggai 1:7-9; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Psalms 84:1-2.

Concert Prayer: Eternal Father, there are days when we neglect our temple and drift along to no purpose; days that are dull and commonplace, days when discouragement and unforeseen obstacles block our way, days when our enemies come to threaten and hinder our work. At such times, wilt thou send thy prophet to warn and comfort us. We need constant inspiration to high endeavor. Incline our hearts to study thy word, that we may catch the glow and the enthusiasm of those who wrought and fought for thee in days of old In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

*Memory Text: For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.—Psalms* 84:10.

Explain: Haggai 1:1 Darius the king. Zerubbabel. 2 This people. The time is not come. 4 Time for you? Ceiled houses? 5 Consider your ways 6 Ye have not enough. Bag with holes. 8 Go up to the mountain. Bring wood. And I will be glorified. 12 The remnant. Did fear. 13 I am with you. 14 Stirred up the spirit. 2:3 Who is left among you? 4 Be strong. 5 My Spirit remaineth. Ezra 4:1 Adversaries. 2 We seek your God. 3 As king Cyrus.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Building Churches*

No sooner had the foundation of the new temple been laid, than an event occurred that led to serious consequences. The people who lived in the land asked permission of Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the priest to assist in the building of the temple. They were a mixed race, descendants of the Israelites who remained in Palestine after the captivity of Israel in 722 B. C., and the people that king Sargon sent to replace the captives. Their offer was refused. It was felt that their mixture of Hebrew and heathen rites of worship would neutralize the pure religion which the Jews sought to establish. The refusal brought bitter opposition from these people. They wrote a letter to Cyrus against the

new colonists, warning him that the Jews were building the temple as a center of rebellion.

This led to an investigation, and in the meantime building operations on the temple ceased. The enthusiasm which was manifested at the laying of the foundation died down, and most of the people became so absorbed in making a living, that they lost interest in the temple. Things went from bad to worse; crops failed, and the colonists were in a desperate condition. Of course their religion was neglected, and sixteen years passed without anything more being done to carry on the work on the temple. Those who had money spent it in building beautiful homes and providing luxuries for themselves, and forgot God. The whole community had lost heart, and needed some impelling power to renew their enthusiasm and hopefulness.

At this juncture, Haggai came to the front. What he had been doing all the years that the colony was drifting away from God, we are not told. Perhaps political conditions were such, that it would have been unwise for him to say anything sooner. At any rate he saw his opportunity now, and took advantage of it. His first message is found in the first chapter. In effect he said to the people: "You complain about hard times and lack of prosperity. But how can you expect to be prosperous when you build costly paneled houses for yourselves, and God's house is neglected. You had better consider your ways. Go up to the mountains and bring timber and build the Lord's house, and he will take pleasure in it, and his name will be glorified."

There was little eloquence and no poetry about Haggai. He had a message for the people, and he delivered it in commonplace language. The temple must be built, or there would be no blessings for them. That was their first and most pressing duty, if God was to be

glorified through them. One writer complains of his book, "that the prophet included stones and timber amongst the essentials of his spiritual and religious ideal." But these were vital, if the temple was to be finished, and the dream of all the prophets had been that it would be restored. How could Ezekiel's river of pure water flow from the temple, unless it was built? The whole religion of Judaism centered around the house of God.

And the wonderful thing about Haggai's preaching was that it succeeded. He got results. No matter how eloquent a prophet may be, if no one pays any attention to him, he does little good. Haggai's language may have been plain and unadorned, but it affected the people to the extent that they got busy and built the temple, so we may say that he was one of the most successful of all the prophets. From Zerubbabel down, the people followed his advice.

What Haggai said to those poor, struggling colonists in Jerusalem in 520 B. C., might with equal truth be said to many communities in our own land today. See what we have built! Skyscrapers one hundred stories high, railroads, automobiles, aeroplanes, bridges, tunnels, and scores of other material things; but are we building religion in the hearts and lives of men? There never can be peace and an enduring prosperity so long as we spend our millions of dollars on the upkeep of our cars, and give our dimes to the upkeep of our religion. The first chapter of Haggai is a perfect description of our modern world.

Who can estimate the spiritual life that came from that little temple on Mount Moriah, that Haggai pleaded for? Had it not been erected, Judasim would have perished, and no greater calamity could have happened to the world. With all its imperfections, it was the nearest approach to God of any religion before the days of

Christ. The world owes an everlasting debt of gratitude to that little group of devoted men and women who in poverty and hardships, greater than we can realize, sacrificed to the limit to erect the house of God that stood for centuries as the hope of mankind. And of that immortal group Haggai stands first. It might almost be said, "No Haggai, no temple!"

The message of this humble prophet to our generation is the same as to his own: "Build great material enterprises to your heart's content, but build religion first." Spirituality is the center of all enduring life. A house of God is of more worth than a house of Morgan. David was humiliated because he lived in a house of cedar, while the Lord dwelt in a tent. Imbued with that thought, Solomon built a magnificent temple. He secured the best design, the best material, the best workmen that could be had in his day, to build this holy sanctuary. In nothing else did he show greater wisdom. His temple to God became the glory of Israel.

All over our land today people are building larger and more expensive churches. This is something to be thankful for. It is an evidence of renewed interest in religion. To be sure, a large and beautiful church is not always proof that those who built it are humble and pure in heart. But this at least is true—people would not make large contributions to the building of churches, if they thought that religion was outworn. In a measure at least, the statement is true, that where our treasures are, there our hearts are also.

Jeremiah saw a day to come when all should know the Lord, from the least to the greatest. Upon the coming generation rests the responsibility of helping to bring about that day. Our churches, cathedrals and temples are the sanctuaries where he may be found. Let the good work of building better and more beautiful places of worship go on! Let every boy and girl in America have a personal interest in some house of God!

No better investment can be made than a contribution to a holy shrine, where we may meet with God.

Haggai, we salute you across the centuries! You won a victory for God, and taught your people a lesson that all generations need to learn. God comes first. His house is paramount, and as temples erected to his name grow in number and dot our land from sea to sea, and from the Lakes to the Gulf, so shall the glory of the Lord shine upon us more and more, until each of us "will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

---

*Worship*

Lord, in this sacred hour within Thy courts we bend,
And bless Thy love and own Thy power; our Father and our Friend.
But Thou art not alone in courts by mortals trod,
Nor only is the day Thine own when man draws near to God;
Thy temple is the arch of the unmeasured sky,
Thy Sabbaths the stupendous march of grand eternity.

*Class Problems*

1. What offer did the Samaritans make? How was it received?
2. What delayed the building of the temple?
3. Where did Haggai live? When did he prophesy?
4. What was the burden of Haggai's message?
5. What application has his message today?
6. What difference does it make where we worship, so long as our hearts are right?
7. Is the building of more beautiful churches an indication of increased spirituality? Discuss.

## Lesson 88

# ZECHARIAH, THE PROPHET OF GLADNESS

Lesson Text: Zech. 1:1-6; 2:1-5; 7:2-10; 8:1-8.

Song; Student Reading: Zech. 7:9-10; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Zech. 8:3.

Concert Prayer: Gracious Lord, we are grateful that we have the privilege of coming in contact with this great prophet of joy and gladness. All around him was gloom and despondency, but he saw only hope and cause for rejoicing. Give unto us that spirit. When clouds are dark above and all around us, give us a vision of their silver lining. May we find each day some new cause of satisfaction. Help us to be obedient to all wholesome laws of life and health and joy, that we may be at peace with all men and with thee. Fill our lives with thankfulness and hope and service to others, that the joy of Jesus Christ our Lord may be our life and light. Amen.

*Memory Text: And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.—Zech.* 7:10.

Explain: 1 The eighth month. The second year of Darius. 3 Unto them. The Lord of hosts. 2:1 A man with a measuring line. 5 A wall of fire. 7:3 Separating myself? 5 Fifth and seventh. 8:2 I was jealous. 3 A city of truth. 6 If it be?

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Unwalled Town*

Among the exiles who returned from Babylon to Jerusalem in 538 B. C., was a boy of priestly descent named Zechariah. Eighteen years later, when he was about thirty years of age, he began to prophesy. Haggai had already sounded the call for the completion of the temple, and this young prophet heartily came to his support. The two men were very different. Haggai, as we have seen, was practical and plain-spoken. Zechariah was also practical, but certain portions of his message are clothed in the language of symbolism, which makes it difficult for us to understand. We shall in this lesson, however, deal with his ethical teachings principally, and they consist of plain, straight reading.

Like Zephaniah, from whom he is separated by the

long period of the exile, Zechariah was a young man, but in every other respect he was different. If we were right in calling Zephaniah one of the saddest books in the Bible, then we may call Zechariah one of the gladdest books. As we stated in our discussion of Haggai, it was a depressing time in Jerusalem. The high hopes and enthusiasm of the exiles when they returned had disappeared. All their gladness had turned to sadness. With poor crops, the Samaritans to misrepresent and lie about them to the king of Babylon, and the heathen nations to plague and worry them at home, what else but discouragement and despondency could be expected?

In this dark hour, Zechariah suddenly lifts up his voice and thrills them with a wonderful message of hope, and a cheering prophecy of the glorious future of Jerusalem. There is not a sad note in the entire chapters of the book that is attributed to Zechariah. This is something unusual among the prophets of Israel, for most of them came with a message of doom and destruction.

We shall consider principally the ethical teachings in this lesson. In chapter 1:1-6, the prophet seeks to encourage his people from history with which they were familiar. "Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live forever?" But the word and will of God have not died, but are still living and active. God's workers may have disappeared, but not God's work. Kingdoms come and go, but God's truth is everlasting; the Spirit of the Lord goes on conquering and to conquer. Zechariah saw God standing in the field of human history, and with his word ever leading men upward and onward. Moral advancement leaves the past behind. "They must upward still and onward who would keep abreast of truth." "Lay hold on God's word," said the prophet to his discouraged countrymen, "and it will bring you into the promised land of all your hopes."

In chapter seven, we have an account of a man coming to Zechariah to enquire if they should keep up their fasting and weeping, as they had done in Babylon. He reminds them that even in Babylon their fasting and their mourning were not done in a religious sense. The thing for them to do now was to forget fasting and mourning, and turn to God in penitence and confidence. "Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassion every man to his brother." And then he added the wonderful memory text in our lesson.

What sound advice this is, even for our day! No good comes from mourning over our troubles. The thing to do is to right-about-face, lay hold of the duties we have neglected, practice the virtues enumerated by Zechariah, and put in operation the principles that make for prosperity and happiness. That is the way, and the only way, that we can overcome trouble and discouragement.

One of the most beautiful chapters in the Bible is chapter eight. But few people are aware of this because it is so seldom read, and it has to be read several times before its real beauty is seen. It is an immortal picture of an earthly heaven in Jerusalem. Old men and women, instead of being pushed aside because they are in the way, are found spending their closing days in comfort and happiness, with their staff in their hands. Girls and boys, instead of being stunted and starved in factories and on farms by hard-hearted employers, are found playing in the streets. Everybody is enjoying all the comforts and happiness that life can give. Men love the Lord and worship him. And people from far and near will want to come to this wonderful city. We quote from the text: "Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord." And in the last sentence where many

nations are speaking: "We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you." What could be more beautiful than that?

In these first eight chapters of Zechariah are to be found the following visions: 1:7-11, *God's Scouts;* 1:18-21, *God's Carpenters;* 2, *The Unwalled Town;* 3, *The New Raiment;* 4, *Church and State;* 5:1-4, *The Flying Book;* 5:5-11, *The Caldron;* 6, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.* These are all intensely interesting if we understand them, and they must have been very effective in reenforcing the lessons which Zechariah was trying to teach. There is only space left to comment on one—*The Unwalled Town.*

A young man for some reason was very much interested in finding out how large Jerusalem was. So he went out with a measuring line to measure the city. And an angel said to him: "Young man, you have all your trouble for nothing. There is no need for you to measure how big Jerusalem is, for Jerusalem is a city without walls. It has no boundaries, no frontiers." Then notice: "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her."

Do we get the significance of that vision? What is the trouble with the world today? Is it not its walls? Its boundaries? When shall we learn the great lesson, that walls are no protection? Were there ever walls that have not been battered down? Was there ever a force that was not overcome by a superior force? Oh, the tragedy of these everlasting walls! Our modern walls are armies, navies, and all the forces of destruction that human ingenuity can devise. Men, with all the history of the past to guide them, still insist that force is necessary to keep peace. What folly! The walls of Jerusalem were her death-warrant again and again. Our militarists declare that we must prepare for war to secure our peace. Well, the nations have been doing that for

thousands of years, but they have never had peace, and never will so long as they prepare for war. Zechariah had a vision of the only way that peace can come—cities without walls, nations without armies and navies, the world disarmed, with God a wall of fire and his glory in the midst of mankind. That and that alone will bring peace on earth and good will among men.

---

*The Recessional*

The tumult and the shouting dies,
The captains and the kings depart;
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget!
For heathen heart that puts her trust
In reeking tube and iron shard—
All valiant dust that builds on dust,
And guarding calls not Thee to guard—
For frantic boast and foolish word,
Thy mercy on Thy people, Lord! Amen.

—Rudyard Kipling.

*Class Problems*

1. Mention the facts given concerning Zechariah.
2. Compare Zechariah with Zephaniah.
3. Why is he called a prophet of gladness?
4. What in effect does he say in chapter 1, verses 1 to 6?
5. What is his message in chapter 7?
6. What beautiful picture does he give in chapter 8?
7. Relate the vision of the unwalled town.
8. Make an application of this vision for our day.

LESSON ~~89~~ 9b

# ESTHER, THE PATRIOT QUEEN

Lesson Text: Esther 3:13-15; 4:10-17; 5; 6:10-11; 7.

Song; Student Reading: Esther 3:13; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Esther 4:14.

Concert Prayer: God of our fathers, wilt thou reveal to us the reason for our coming into the world, and why we came at "such a time as this." We feel there is a destiny that shapes our ends, and that we have a certain work to do. Give us the vision to see our mission, that we may make preparation for the day when the call to duty comes. May we never forget the courage and heroism of those who have lived and died for others. Help us to cherish the high ideals they have left us, and consecrate our lives afresh to the service of mankind. In Christ's name. Amen.

*Memory Text: I will go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.—Esther* 4:16.

Explain: 3:13 Posts. 15 Was perplexed. 5:1 On the third day. 6 The banquet of wine? 8 I will do * * * hath said. 9 In the king's gate. 11 The multitude of his children. 7:4 We are sold. Although the enemy. 8 The bed. They covered Haman's face. 9 Who had spoken good.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *If I Perish, I Perish*

This is a lesson in patriotism—the story of a beautiful woman who risked her life to save her people. Queen Esther has come down to us as the heroine of patriotic devotion—the incarnation of Jewish nationality. Through all the centuries she has been an inspiration to women who have sought to serve their country, and an incentive to deeds of daring for heroic men.

It will be remembered that only a few, comparatively speaking, of the Jews ever returned to Jerusalem to live. The great majority remained and scattered over what later became the Persian empire. They became rich in temporal things, but neglected their religious duties; and in a great measure forgot God. Still they remained a peculiar people —proud, haughty, unsociable and generally disliked.

Yet from this conquered and therefore despised people came Esther, the queen of Persia. The king had selected her because of her beauty, and did not know that she was a Jewess. Her elevation to such an exalted position did not make her vain or proud. She carried her high honors with a dignity and charm that made her a general favorite.

When she was about twenty-five years of age and had been queen for nine years, a crisis came into her life, that tried her as few women have been tried. Haman, the king's favorite minister, stood next to his royal master, and demanded the homage of all the king's subjects. Mordecai, Esther's uncle, refused to bow to him or acknowledge his superiority in any way. This made Haman very angry, and he determined to be revenged not only on Mordecai, but on all the Jews in the Persian kingdom. He easily persuaded the king to issue a proclamation, condemning all the Jews in the kingdom to death. "If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed." And the king replied, "Do with them as it seemeth good to thee."

Mordecai immediately made an appeal to Esther to stand forth as the savior of her people. This was the charge that he laid upon her, "that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people."

This was a real test of Esther's character. There were difficulties in carrying out such a request that the uncle did not realize. In the first place, it jeopardized her own life, and might be of no value to her people. Then there was a law that on pain of death, no woman, not even his wife, should come into the presence of the king unbidden. There was only one hope, if she broke this law, that she might escape the penalty. This was for the king to hold out his golden scepter as she approached. But the fact that Esther had not been called into the royal presence for thirty days seemed to indicate that he had tired of her, and was inter-

ESTHER AND HAMAN.

From a painting by Ernest Normand

ested in another favorite. The queen did not refuse to comply with her uncle's request, but she made this explanation to him, that he might understand the situation.

Mordecai was insistent, however, that the only hope of saving the Jews lay with Esther, and he made another earnest appeal for her support, and closed with this statement: "If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: *and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*"

This last clause should remain with us, for to every person there comes in life some such crisis as Esther faced, when his destiny is at stake, when the very purpose of his coming into the world hangs in the balance. From one standpoint there was no need for Esther to go out and meet almost certain death, especially, when the chances were that her death would do no good. Indeed, it was possible that her temerity in approaching the king unbidden might militate not only against her, but against her people as well. There were plenty of arguments that could be advanced against her interference. That is always the case in such a situation. Life is so pleasant, ease and comfort so attractive, and selfishness so much a part of our lives, that when a real sacrifice is required of us, we generally argue ourselves out of it, and go the easy way that leads us down to death and oblivion. We read that Jesus steadfastly set his face to go up to Jerusalem. It takes courage to do that in the face of certain death. But it was necessary to go there in order that he might accomplish the purpose for which he came into the world. So Esther, if she would justify her coming to the kingdom, must, at this critical moment, place her life on the altar of sacrifice for the salvation of her people.

Mordecai's sublime appeal was effective. Esther did not sidestep or make excuses, but rose to the occasion as a

true daughter of the royal race from which she sprang. Nothing is said about her faith in God, but the fact that she asked her people to fast and pray for her success indicates that she looked to him for strength to carry out her high resolve. When she nerved herself to face the king, she would rely not on her beauty and charm, but on the faith and prayers of her people. That she felt doubtful of the outcome is certain from the statement that she sent to her uncle: "I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: *and if I perish, I perish.*"

We all know how grandly she succeeded, how the proud and wicked Haman, who was responsible for the cruel edict against the Jews, was denounced by Esther to the king, and hanged on the gallows erected for Mordecai; and how this hated Jew was raised to the highest position in the kingdom. Best of all, the Jews were saved, and the brave queen, who had risked her life for her people, was honored and esteemed more than ever by the king. She won his admiration by her courage and loyalty, and left a name that has been a synonym for patriotism through all generations.

"If I perish, I perish," these were the words that made Esther immortal. And they should ever stand in our lives as a confirmation of the great truth uttered by Jesus, that they who would find their lives must first lose them. No life, however successful it may be in other respects, can ever be complete or live in the affections of mankind, that has not in some way sacrificed itself for the good of others. "If I perish, I perish," is the voice of consecration to the service of humanity. Only by making these words our own can we fulfil our destiny, and justify our presence among mankind.

*The Will to Act*

Grant us the will to fashion as we feel,
Grant us the strength to labor as we know,
Grant us the purpose, ribbed and edged with steel,
    To strike the blow.
Knowledge we ask not—knowledge Thou hast lent,
But, Lord, the will—there lies our bitter need,
Give us to build above the deep intent
    The deed, the deed.

—J. Drinkwater.

*Class Problems*

1. Give a good definition of patriotism.
2. Give an account of how Esther became queen.
3. Who was Haman, and why did he hate the Jews?
4. What proclamation did Haman get the king to issue?
5. What request did Mordecai make of Esther?
6. What statement did Esther make to her uncle in reply?
7. Give the substance of Mordecai's reply to the queen.
8. Give Esther's final answer to Mordecai's request.
9. What great truth is contained in this story?
10. How can we apply this truth to ourselves?

LESSON 90

## EZRA, THE PRIEST AND SCRIBE

Lesson Text: Ezra 7:6-10; 8:21-23, 31-32; 9:10-12; 10:1-5, 10-14.

Song; Student Reading: Ezra 9:10-12; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Ezra 10:11.

Concert Prayer: Our Father, thou art a God of glory and holiness. Help us to remember who and what we are. Thou hast made us in thine own image and likeness, a little lower than the angels and crowned us with glory and honor. Wilt thou keep us from contamination with everything that is unclean. May we always keep in mind our glorious heritage and so live and conduct ourselves that we may transmit to our descendants the divinity that lives in us. To this end, our Father, we consecrate our lives and pray that thou wilt keep us from contact with all degrading influences that would tend to lower our standard of purity and holiness. Amen.

*Memory Text: For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.—Ezra* 7:10.

Explain: 7:6 A ready scribe. All his request. 9 Began he to go up. 10 To teach in Israel. 8:22 The enemy in the way. 9:11 The filthiness of the people. 10:3 According to the law. 5 The chief priests. 13 We are many. 14 Let now our rulers * * * stand. 15 Were employed about.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *A Wonderful Achievement*

Eighty years have passed since Zerubbabel led the first emigration from Babylon back to Jerusalem, and fifty-eight years since the rebuilt temple was finished in 516 B. C. Their first enthusiasm had been spent, and the people were drifting along without accomplishing their great mission. The services and sacrifices which the Lord expected in connection with the temple were being shamefully neglected. Worse still, the new generation that was growing up seemed indifferent to religion, and young people were intermarrying with the heathen neighbors around them. This was in direct opposition to what God had commanded. The Sabbath was also neglected, and a general demoralization throughout the colony.

A Jewish priest and scribe by the name of Ezra, who lived in Babylon, heard about these terrible conditions in Jerusalem, and asked permission of the king of Persia to return with another colony to the land of his ancestors, and once more put the law of God into effect among his people. The king kindly granted his request, and issued an edict granting all Jews who desired to do so permission to leave Babylon; and authorizing Ezra to carry offerings for the temple, made by the king and by the Jews. This included sacrificial animals, money and all necessary supplies.

Ezra left Babylon in March, 458 B. C. Nine days after his departure, he reviewed his company at a place called Ahava, which was the end of the civilized and policed section. Here a fast was proclaimed, and prayers were offered to God that he would protect them and their little ones through the bandit-infested regions ahead. Ezra preferred to rely on God rather than ask for soldiers to guard them, since he had declared to the king, "The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him." Here also Ezra checked up on his volunteers, and found that he did not have enough men who were qualified to administer in the temple, and he sent back for more Levites. Next, he made an audit of all the valuables they were taking back to Jerusalem, and gave them in charge of trustworthy men. God was with them on their journey, and in four months they reached Jerusalem, having traveled nine hundred miles.

It was said of Ezra that he had set his heart to *seek* the law, to *do* the law and to *teach* the law. That statement reveals to us the character of the man. His whole heart was in the work that he was doing. It is not enough for us to seek the truth; we must live it also. Ezra wanted to obey the truth when he found it; and he desired to try it out in his own life before he taught it to others. If he found that it squared with his own experience, then he was ready to teach it to the rising generation. How wise this was! No one can really teach religion, if he has not lived

and practiced his own teachings. We are amazed at those ancient teachers in Israel. What a passion they had for their law! "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation day and night." "Thy law is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalms 119:97, 105.) Such intenseness, such a passion for the word of the Lord, is the glory of Israel. It makes us ashamed of our own lack of zeal for the new and higher covenant which we have entered into with Christ.

When Ezra came to Jerusalem, he found to his consternation that every wall that separated Israel and the Gentiles had been broken down. There was nothing except the name that distinguished his people from the Canaanites. The priests and Levites, as well as the laity, had intermarried with the heathen races around them, until there seemed no possible way of saving the pure blood of Israel. We can imagine the horror and astonishment of Ezra, when he found this condition. And the princes and rulers who should have been shepherds of God's flock were the "chief in trespass." No wonder that the great priest made a solemn national confession of sin and entreated God's mercy upon the "remnant that is escaped." We have in 9:6-15 one of the most pathetic prayers in history. And "when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore."

The prayer must have had a tremendous effect, for the leaders came forward and made a public confession of their sins, and proposed to enter into a covenant to put away their strange wives. Ezra then asked all of them, "make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives." Then all the

congregation answered and said with a loud voice, "As thou hast said, so must we do."

No wonder this remarkable man set an indelible mark upon all succeeding ages. He stood at the cradle of Judaism, and turned the stream of his people's history into a new channel. He destroyed the last vestige of idolatry in Israel, and set the Jews apart from all other nations as a distinct and a peculiar people, into whose hands were committed the destiny of the world's salvation. Men may sneer and call his policy narrow, but there was no other way to keep the pure blood of the ancient world unpolluted for the life that was to redeem mankind from sin.

How could one man, single-handed, accomplish a miracle so stupendous? Why did they not rend him to pieces, when he even suggested that their family life be broken up, and their social conduct completely changed? It is hard to answer that question. The account of his life is so incomplete in our Bible, that we can only guess at the cause of his remarkable success. It is reasonable to suppose that the statement in 7:10 is the source of it. When a man set his heart to *seek,* to *do* and to *teach* the word of God, with a personality and leadership such as Ezra must have had, he becomes invincible, and all opposition melts away before him. Let all those who seek to mould and shape the characters of men and women for good profit by his example.

---

*Speak to Us, Lord*

Speak to us, Lord, until our hearts are melted
To share in Thy compassion for the lost:
Till our souls throb with intercession
That they shall know Thy name whate'er the cost!
Speak, Lord, that those who gladly have obeyed Thee
May feel afresh the urge that drove them forth,

And yield themselves anew to loyal service,
That lips and lives may tell Thy matchless worth.
—J. M. Fordham.

*Class Problems*

1. How long a time elapsed between the return and the time of Ezra?
2. Tell all you can about the colony in Jerusalem during this time.
3. In what condition did Ezra find the people?
4. Can you trace a similar laxity in social relations today?
5. What did Ezra do when he reached Jerusalem?
6. What did he ask the people to do?
7. How can we justify such severe measures?
8. To what do you attribute Ezra's success? Discuss.

LESSON 91 Marks

# NEHEMIAH, THE WALL BUILDER

Lesson Text: Nehemiah 1:1-7; 4; 8:1-3, 5, 6, 12.

Song; Student Reading: Nehemiah 1:2-3; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Nehemiah 5:9.

Concert Prayer: O Lord, inspire each of us with a great dominating ideal in life and give us an intense and holy zeal to accomplish our heart's desire. May we stand true and loyal to our ideal in spite of ridicule and all the opposition that may be organized against us. When discouragements come and our enemies' hopes are high, give us a "mind to work," that we may set an example of high resolve and consecrated purpose to all men. Whether in days of fighting or nights of weary watching, may we be faithful and fearless until our efforts are crowned with success, and the ideal for which we have striven realized. And thine shall be the glory. Amen.

*Memory Text: I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?—Nehemiah* 6:3.

Explain: 1:2 Which were left. 3 The province. The wall * * * broken down. 4:1 Sanballat. 2 Fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? 4 In the land of captivity. 6 Was joined * * * thereof. 9 We made our prayer * * * a watch. 12 From all places. 13 On the higher places. 15 We returned. 16 Habergeons. 17 With those that laded. Every one * * * weapon. 21 Half of them. 23 Men of the guard. Saving that * * * washing.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Power of an Ideal*

Thirteen years after Ezra went to Jerusalem, Nehemiah, the Jewish cup-bearer of Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, heard that the city was in great distress. The wall was broken down, the gates burned and enemies who did not want it to grow, surrounded the city. When Nehemiah heard this sad news, he "sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven." Nehemiah was a favorite of the king and had brilliant prospects; but the ruins of Jerusalem had more attractions for him than the splendors of Susa, and he gave up the chances of a great career, that he might make the journey to Jerusalem and see what he could do to help

bring about better conditions. This he did at a great personal sacrifice, with no other motive than that he cared for his people. They might resent his interference, and tell him to attend to his own business. So keenly did he feel that the people in Jerusalem might consider his coming an intrusion, that he spent three days in the city without daring to hint at his purpose. He made a circuit of the city by night to examine its defenses, for fear that people might see him and suspect his intentions. When he saw the desolation of the place, the masses of rubbish that choked the Kidron ravine, and the walls leveled to the ground, he went without delay to the inhabitants and appealed to their patriotism: "Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach."

The appeal had the desired effect. His idea was contagious, and he persuaded everyone to pitch in and help. Even those who were not used to hard manual labor, such as goldsmiths and noblemen, responded. The way he managed the work showed great skill and sagacity. He enlisted all the people in his great undertaking, and organized them under local leaders, and set them to the task in which they were most interested. In five cases at least, he had men working on the breaches that were nearest their own homes. He arranged the work in such a way that it inspired a spirit of natural rivalry, as well as common loyalty. Nehemiah himself directed the entire work, and instituted a strict military rule, which not only secured efficiency but also protection. Often he jumped into the work himself, and did his bit when seeming impossibilities had to be overcome.

Nehemiah found strong opposition from the non-Jewish groups living in Palestine. They did not want to see Jerusalem prosper. Perhaps they were jealous; it is certain that they were dangerous. First, they tried to under-

mine Nehemiah's influence by ridiculing the rising wall as "mere stones out of the heaps of rubbish," so feeble that a fox could break it down. Nehemiah paid no attention to this; he went on working. His opponents, seeing that ridicule did not work, tried to scare him. They appeared in arms. That would be likely to dampen the ardor of a great many. When hands were blistered and heads ache, and backs are sore, and enemies come to demand that work cease, spiritual enthusiasm is likely to cool, and it is easy to quit work. But even this could not daunt the cup-bearer. He simply did two jobs instead of one. Some of the men had to stop working and stand guard. His enemies organized against him, and he replied by organizing a defense that would be realy to drop everything, and rush to the place of attack at a given signal.

After this Sanballat, and his associate leaders of the opposition, made terrible threats against Nehemiah; they would ruin him by sending a report back to the king of Babylon that he was fomenting a rebellion. In answer to this Nehemiah replied, "Your report would be a lie; I shall not stop." His enemies next proposed a conference about it all. They wanted him to come down and talk things over with them. But there was nothing to confer about, and Nehemiah gave them a fine answer: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease?" Why, indeed! Too many of us are ready on the slightest suggestion to give up the important work that we are doing. What a lesson Nehemiah teaches us! Ridicule, fear, threats, union of forces and organization against him, and offer to compromise, all failed to move him or delay the thing he had set his hand to do a single day. Finally, when all else failed, an effort was made to get Nehemiah to take refuge in the temple for safety, on the ground that his life was in danger. Had he heeded this advice, it would have injured his influence with the people; but he saw through the plot and refused to heed

the suggestion in these memorable words: "Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in."

Another great evil had to be met. Scarcity of food in the city led to suffering among the poor. The wealthier classes took advantage of their necessities, and sold their children into slavery to recover on loans they had made. Nehemiah summoned the offenders before a public meeting. He reviewed his own unselfish course, and appealed to their generosity to restore mortgaged lands and remit at least part of the debt which the poor were unable to pay. It is pleasing to know that his request was not in vain, and that they took an oath to deal more kindly with those in need. So Nehemiah was hindered in every way, but he had started out to build these walls, and he persisted until the work was finished.

Shortly after the celebration service of the completion of the walls, a great event occurred in Jerusalem. This was the reading of the Law of Moses to the people. They did not know much about their own religion; but Nehemiah, who was now the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, were determined that they should know it. So a great wooden pulpit was erected in a place where the people could congregate. Then Ezra read the scriptures in their hearing in the Hebrew language, and it was translated by other men and the meaning explained, that all could understand it. They had lived in Babylon so long, that they had forgotten their own language.

Great interest must have followed the reading, for we are told that fear and contrition followed, and the people wept because they realized how far they had gone astray from the true faith. But Ezra wanted them to rejoice because of God's goodness, not weep because they were afraid of him. Then the Feast of the Tabernacles was celebrated, and from day to day, as Ezra continued to read more and more of their laws and wonderful history and

the promises made to them, a great joy came into their lives. They had much still to learn, but their hearts were now in the right place, and a new day had dawned for them. Judaism was born and given such vitality under the leadership of these two great men, that now after twenty-four centuries have passed it is still one of the great forces for righteousness in the world.

Nehemiah was a worthy contemporary of the great priest and scribe, and stands almost as high in the services he rendered his people—in some respects higher. To Ezra we owe the present compilation of the Bible; and Nehemiah was the first great layman to sacrifice himself for his religion and his country. Neither of these men has received the recognition they deserve as heroes of the faith. Nehemiah epitomizes in the short account of his activities every element that makes for success. Salesmen, businessmen, ministers, lawyers, teachers, in fact men in every walk of life, should read the wonderful story of this man, and profit by his example.

---

*Have a Purpose*

Live for something, have a purpose,
And that purpose keep in view;
Drifting like a helpless vessel,
Thou canst ne'er to life be true.
Half the wrecks that strew the ocean,
If some star had been their guide,
Might have long been riding safely,
But they drifted with the tide.

*Class Problems*

1. What position did Nehemiah hold in Persia?
2. What caused him to leave and go to Jerusalem?
3. What was the secret of his success in building the wall? (4:6.)

4. Name the different forms of opposition that the builders met.
5. Give a character sketch of Nehemiah.
6. In what way does Nehemiah inspire us?
7. Discuss 4:14; 4:20.
8. What kind of opposition is hardest to meet?
9. Tell about the reading of the Law.

LESSON 92

# JOEL, THE PROPHET OF PENTECOST

Lesson Text: Joel 1:2-17; 2:1-14, 21-32.

Song; Student Reading: Joel 2:12-14; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Joel 2:28.

Concert Prayer: Eternal Father, we come before thee in humility today and pray that we may hear and heed the cry to repentance that Joel sounded, and turn unto the Lord our God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. We confess our sins and follies, and pray for thy forgiveness. Hasten the day when thy Spirit shall be poured out in rich abundance upon thy children—when sons and daughters shall prophesy, and old men shall dream dreams, and young men see visions. Help us to become worthy of this great blessing, we humbly pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord will do great things.—Joel* 2:21.

Explain: 1:4 Palmerworm, cankerworm, caterpillar, and locust. 5 New wine. 6 A nation. My land. The teeth of a lion. 7 Cast it away. 9 The meat offering. The drink offering. 11 Be ye ashamed. 12 Palm tree. 13 Gird yourselves. 14 Sanctify ye a fast. 15 The day of the Lord. 2:4 So shall they run. 5 Shall they leap. 12 With all your heart. 23 The former * * * and the latter rain. 27 And my people. 28 Afterward. My Spirit. Your daughters.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *Prophecies, Dreams, Visions*

Again we are confronted with a shadowy figure that we cannot locate in either time or space. We do not know where Joel was born or anything in regard to his personality, where he lived, or when he prophesied. It is probable that he was a native of Judah and a citizen of Jerusalem, because he speaks so familiarly of Zion and Jerusalem. Because of the great interest which he manifests in the temple, it has been inferred that he was a priest. But this is by no means certain. His prophecy concerns Judah only, but the date of it is a matter of dispute. It has been assigned to different periods from 750 B. C. to 350 B. C. The preponderance of evidence seems to indicate that it was written after the exile, and later than the reading of

the Law by Ezra in 444 B. C. So far as our purpose is concerned, it makes no difference.

The first division of the book gives a vivid description of a plague of locusts, accompanied by drought. In order that we may sense the overwhelming calamity of such a plague, we quote from Mr. Aaronsohn, a witness of a similar plague in 1915: "In less than two months after their (the locusts) first appearance, not only was every green leaf devoured, but the very bark was peeled from the trees, which stood out white and lifeless, like skeletons. The fields were stripped to the ground. Even Arab babies left by their mothers in the shade of some tree, had their faces devoured before their screams were heard." Nothing can stop them in their resistless march; they climb walls, enter houses by doors and windows, and even gnaw the woodwork of the rooms. Like a powerful army, they march through the land, leaving desolation behind them.

The purpose of Joel in referring to this terrible plague is to warn the people that the Day of the Lord is at hand, unless they repent. This great swarm of insects is the Lord's army; he is at their head, and they come to do the work entrusted to them, which is the destruction of the wicked. But repentance may avert the judgment, and this is the message of the prophet to his countrymen. They respond to his exhortations, and he is then commissioned to announce the removal of the plague.

Many writers have contended that Joel's locusts were to be interpreted as figurative and allegorical; but we have every reason to believe that the plague actually occurred, and that the prophet was speaking to real people and warning them that God was bringing destruction upon them because of their sins. It may be taken also as a symbol of God's final judgment on those who have transgressed the laws of God, and are unrepentant. Wickedness that scorns God's mercy and refuses every offer of salva-

tion has within itself the seeds of death. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," said Ezekiel; and all history bears witness to the truth of this statement. There is no escape from that edict, except through repentance.

The principal thought in Joel's prophecy is the idea of the *Day of the Lord*, a time in the future when the Lord himself would directly interpose in the affairs of men. That day will be one of terror, and also of blessing. It will sift out the righteous, and bring judgment upon the wicked. This was mentioned in connection with the prophecy of Zephaniah. It may be added here that while we do not know when that final day will come, there is a day of decision for each of us. The powers of destruction are at work in every life, and every person must meet the issue. Each of us is confronted by the terrible plague of locusts, unseen perhaps, but real nevertheless. It cannot be stayed, unless we follow the advice of Joel. God throws out to us the life-line. We may take it, and live; or reject it, and die.

Joel also predicts the coming of a day when the Spirit of God shall be poured out on all flesh, and every one shall enjoy some heavenly gift. Of course this does not mean that God will give the gifts of his Spirit both to the righteous and the wicked, for we read: "*Your* sons and *your* daughters shall prophesy, *your* old men shall dream dreams, *your* young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit." This statement suggests that the prophet merely meant to include all classes in the ranks of Israel, as entitled to receive this wonderful blessing.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter made the statement that the power by which he and his associate apostles spoke was the fulfilment of the prediction made by Joel, that God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh. But this did not exhaust the prediction; for in his sermon he promised this same Spirit to all who would repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission

of their sins. Neither did Peter forget to mention the judgment that should come upon those who would not call upon the name of the Lord. Salvation and judgment always move side by side.

The power of the Spirit that Joel spoke of, and which the apostles received on the day of Pentecost, is but faintly realized even by those who are entitled to enjoy its gifts. One of the greatest miracles of all ages is the record of these insignificant fishermen, after they had been endowed with the power of the Spirit. They literally turned the world upside down. Think of it, chosen by One whose presence in the world was unknown beyond a limited district in a remote province of the great Roman empire, without education, money or social standing, these timid men in a single generation diffused the teachings of Jesus Christ throughout the known world. When it is remembered that the nature of their message was at variance with all the religions in the world, that it met the combined contempt, ridicule and relentless opposition of all religious and secular powers, and in spite of all this continued to grow until mighty Rome herself bowed before its subtle power, we can only stand amazed and humbly confess, "it passeth all understanding."

And we are heirs to all the gifts and power of that same Spirit. There is nothing that the fishermen did that we may not do. They had no strength that we are not entitled to. Are we content, Esau-like, to sell our heritage for less than a mess of pottage? Pentecost does not come to those who are not waiting to be endowed with power from on high.

"Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions." That is the prediction of Joel; that is what he says to us, and its fulfilment is in our hands. Prophecies, dreams, visions—what could be more uplifting? These are God's gift to men, but they do not come in sordid

places. Like Habakkuk, we must stand on our watchtower and ask and wait for them. The greatest need of the world today is spiritual. Let the words of Amos ring in our ears: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." Who will supply that need? Who will speak to the people "the word of the Lord"? Those upon whom have been poured the Spirit of God—the prophets, the dreamers, the young men and women who have seen visions. These are to feed the world with the Bread of Life. Shall we be among the honored group? It is for us to say!

---

*My Life*

This thing will I do, most gratefully—
I will accept the life God gives to me,
And wear it proudly, wear it patiently.
Moulded and fashioned by His mighty hand,
He gives to me the life that He has planned,
And bids me take and use and understand.
Among the mililons of Eternity, there's none like me.
Oh life! I bow before thee reverently!
High privilege! a gift so rare to take!
So I accept it, and for Thy great sake,
Of this, the life Thou giv'st, the best will make.
—Author Unknown.

*Class Problems*

1. What do we know about the prophet Joel?
2. Describe a locust plague in Palestine.
3. What was Joel's purpose in telling about such a plague?
4. What effect did his plea for repentance have?
5. Quote Joel's prophecy concerning the Spirit of God.

6. What did Peter say concerning this prophecy? (Acts 2:16-18.)
7. Are we entitled to that Spirit today? Prove your answer.
8. Why do so few enjoy this blessing?
9. What is the greatest need in the world? Discuss.
10. Quote Amos 8:11-12.

Lesson 93

# JOB, THE PROPHET OF SUFFERING

Lesson Text: Job 1; 2:1-10.

Song; Student Reading: Job 3:17-22; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Job 19:25-26.

Concert Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, thou art a God of righteousness; thy mercy is over them that serve thee, and thy love is toward all thy children. This is thy world, and all that pertains unto it is thy concern and interest. But it is a world of suffering and sorrow and cruelty, where injustice and poverty are seen on every hand, where the wicked prosper and the righteous are hungry and naked. We are perplexed at times and fail to see thy hand in the affairs of men, or why these conditions should prevail in a world which thou hast made. Father, increase our faith. May our trust in thee remain unshaken. Enlighten our minds, quicken our understanding, that we may comprehend thy purposes and honor thee in all we see. Amen.

*Memory Text: The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.—Job* 1:21.

Explain: 1:1 The land of Uz. Perfect. 2 Seven * * * three. 5 When the days * * * were gone about. Burnt offerings. 6 Now there was a day. The sons of God. Satan. 10 An hedge. 11 Curse thee to thy face. 15 Sabeans. 16 The fire of God. 20 Rent his mantle. Worshipped. 21 Thither. 22 Charged God foolishly. 2:3 Although thou movest. 4 Skin for skin. 7 Sore boils. 8 A potsherd. He sat down among the ashes. 10 With his lips.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Problem of Evil*

The book of Job deals with the problem of human suffering, a theme as old and as wide as the world. It is still with us, and still unsolved. The idea among the early Hebrews was that by doing right and keeping the law, they would live a long, happy and successful life. They were promised by their teachers and prophets that if they obeyed God's commandments, he would bless them with material riches, and protect them from their enemies. "Be good, and you will prosper," was the formula. But as time went on, it was found that the formula did not always work. The good often suffered as well as the wicked. The rain

fell on the just and on the unjust alike. Indeed, sometimes the righteous went down to defeat, while victory perched upon the banners of the wicked. Jeremiah walked in the depths of affliction and suffering, while Jehoiakim sat on the throne in his pride, and gloried in his wickedness.

To make this truth clear to the people some unknown prophet wrote the story of Job. The book has three parts —a Prologue, the Poem, and an Epilogue. The Prologue introduces us to Job, a righteous man who lived in the land of Uz. He is surrounded by every evidence of divine favor. He has a large family and immense herds of camels, oxen, asses and sheep. The first scene opens in heaven, where God and his angels are assembled. The adversary, or Satan, is also there, and suggests that Job merely worships God for what he can get out of it. He obtains permission to test Job's sincerity by stripping him of every material blessing. The good man loses all his property, and his children are cut off by a violent death. Job stands the test without a murmur, and reverently submits to the will of God.

In a second heavenly council, Satan comes forward again and suggests that all a man has he will give for his life, but if his bone and flesh is touched he will curse God to his face. The Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life." Job is now smitten with a loathsome disease, which is so terrible that he becomes an outcast, abhorred and shunned by everyone. Still he remains loyal to God, and his faith is unshaken. His wife asks him to do what Satan said he would—Curse God. "What!" Job answered, "shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

Three friends now come to condole with him. They are so appalled at the sight of his misery, that they sit down for seven days and nights and never utter a word. Then Job breaks down, and in a speech of marvelous pathos

and power, he curses the day he was born and calls for death to come and end his sufferings.

After this his friends speak, and Job answers each in turn. They contend that suffering is a certain proof of previous transgression, and adopt a tone of rebuke towards Job on account of his supposed sin, and urge him to repent. They promise him that if he will confess and repent, that God will restore to him his previous prosperity. Their argument is that God is always just, and if a man suffers, it must be because he deserves to suffer. The righteous never suffer. Of course Job knows better, and he tells them so. They insist that he must be wrong, because their elders and teachers have always taught that suffering was the result of sin. But Job insists that no matter what has been taught, he is guilty of no sin that could merit such sufferings as he endures. He even declares that he would face God and defend himself against an accusation of sin. A young man named Elihu injects himself into the argument, but adds little that is new to what has already been said.

Finally, the friends are silenced, and we come to the last section of the poem. Job has expressed a wish to meet God face to face. In answer to this, the Lord speaks to him out of a whirlwind. Job expected God to give an explanation of his sufferings, but he did not refer to them at all. He simply calls attention to the marvelous creations in the universe, and asks Job if he could make any of these things, or rule the world. If not, why should he presume to question the ways or doings of the Almighty, or criticize his government of the world? All that God says seems irrelevant to the problem of Job's sufferings. Yet Job is satisfied. He has come face to face with God, and feels that he has been presumptuous in even questioning the ways of God with men. He makes humble confession of his mistake. "I have uttered what I understood not," he says, and repents in dust and ashes.

And so the problem of suffering remained unsolved. Job learned something about the omnipotence of God, but nothing more. The world is still asking and discussing the question. One of the most plausible explanations is that evil is needed for character-building. Suffering is necessary, some say, to cultivate in us patience, fortitude and self-control. A father punishes his child, or sets before him an uncongenial task; so God deals with his children. It is true that many men have been made wiser and stronger by pain. Suffering does build character, and adversity can often be turned into an asset. The loss of an arm or leg, or even eyesight, has sometimes made men bigger and stronger than they would have been without these afflictions.

But this explanation fails to cover many of the evils of life. The sons and daughters of Job were not educated by the violent deaths they suffered. Instead of fortitude and courage being developed in Job's wife, when she saw the terrible affliction of her husband, she lost all heart and interest in life. Her faith was gone and she could only say, "Curse God, and die." A man's family, buried alive under the ruins of an earthquake on which he is standing, is not going to get much character development out of the experience. Pain is not always tempered to men's strength. Sorrow that breaks men's hearts is worse than useless.

Is a God of love—of mercy and kindness—responsible for all this? Does he control the destructive cyclone, the devastating fire, the raging flood? Are famine, pestilence, contagions, earthquakes and human misery in a thousand forms, the work of his hands? Does he see crippled and suffering children and hear the pitiful cries of the poor and friendless in every land, and approve of these things? It is hard to think so. If that were true, then we do wrong to seek to remedy them. Why minister to the sick, why comfort the mourner, why give to the poor, if God is

sending these afflictions for their good? We would be interfering with his plans, if we sought to do away with sorrow and suffering.

May it not be that God's omnipotence is relative, and not absolute? If not, then it must be that since these evils exist, he is willing that they should. Is it not a more satisfying conception to believe that God, for some reason, is unable to remove all evils from the world at this time, or at least he cannot remove them without bringing on greater evils. Surely it is easier to believe this, than that he is indifferent to pain and suffering. "The only admissible theory of creation is that God cannot at once and all together subdue the powers of evil, either physical or moral."

Accepting this view, there is no need of our apologizing for the evil in the world. It is our business to hate it as God hates it, and fight it as God is fighting it, with all the forces at his command, until it is conquered. And the glory of it is that he needs our help. We are to be co-partners with him to free the world from evil. The problem then is not how to explain or justify suffering, but how to help God get rid of it as soon as possible. Of this we may be certain, that in the end evil will be conquered, righteousness will prevail and joy will reign on the earth and good-will among the children of men. In the meantime, we must bear with what fortitude and patience we can the suffering and sorrow that come to us, and do all in our power to help God and all good men and women to make the world better.

---

*Helping God*

When any master holds
'Twixt chin and hand a violin of mine,
He will be glad that Stradivari lived,
Made violins and made them of the best.

. . . For while God gives them skill
I give them instruments to play upon,
God choosing me to help Him. . . .
. . . If my hand slacked
I should rob God—since He is fullest good—
Leaving a blank instead of violins.
. . . He could not make
Antonio Stradivari's violins
Without Antonio.

—George Eliot.

*Class Problems*

1. Tell about Job at the opening of the story.
2. Give an account of God and his angels in council.
3. What was Satan's attitude toward Job?
4. What permission was given to Satan? What was the result?
5. Tell about the second council.
6. What permission was given Satan this time? What was the result?
7. What theory did the Hebrews hold in regard to prosperity?
8. What is the problem of the book of Job?
9. What was the argument of Job's friends?
10. What was Job's argument? What was the outcome?
11. What theory of evil is given in this lesson?

## LESSON 94

# JONAH, THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET

Lesson Text: Jonah 3; 4.

Song; Student Reading: Jonah 4:1-2; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Jonah 4:11.

Concert Prayer: Teach us, our Father, that thou art no respecter of persons. Every nation and every people are fields for the preaching of thy word, and we pray that we may be worthy to take the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth. Preserve us from the selfish nationalism and racial pride of which so many boast. Keep us from narrowness and bigotry. Help us to become one hundred per cent Christians, that we may respect as brothers the people of every land. Give us a daily vision of the world of men as thou dost see and love them. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Memory Text: Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.—Acts* 10:34, 35.

Explain: 3:1 Jonah (See 2 Kings 14:25). 3 An exceeding great city. 6 Sackcloth, and * * * ashes. 10 God repented. 4:4 Doest thou well to be angry? 5 Booth. 6 Gourd. 8 Vehement. 11 That cannot discern?

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Highest Point*

The prophet Jonah lived during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel, 750 B. C., in a little town about four miles north of Nazareth. He did not write the book bearing his name, and Bible scholars are not agreed as to who did write it, or when it was written. We are inclined to the view that it was after the time of Ezra, perhaps about 435 B. C. Whenever it was, the author reaches the highest point in the Old Testament, and reveals prophetic religion at its best.

The book of Jonah is a protest against the narrowness of thought and sympathy, which prevailed among the Jews. For the first time in the history of Israel, a prophet dares to advance the idea that God is interested in other nations. Jewish prophets preached to Jews only. Even Ezekiel, who lived in Babylon, did no missionary work except

among his own people. The idea prevailed that salvation was for none except the Jews. The author of Jonah had higher thoughts of God than any other writer of the Old Testament, and entertained more charitable feelings toward the Gentiles than had ever been expressed before. He believed that since God ruled over all nations, he cared for all men. If Gentiles were ready to repent, God was as ready to pardon them, as he was penitent Jews. More than this, God sought their repentance and was ready to send missionaries to warn them of the destruction that would come upon the wicked.

And of all cities to select Nineveh as the place to send the first missionary! We need only to recall what Nahum said about the people of that city to understand the hatred of Israel for Nineveh. Had they not plundered their land, murdered their leaders, and carried Israel into captivity? Surely, God could have no mercy for such a people. No wonder Jonah rebelled, and tried to run away from his mission. Such a call ran counter to all the prejudices of his people for a thousand years. Nineveh was the home of all the sins that men could commit, and yet God had a message for them. But so great was the prophet's hatred that he refused to deliver it—not because he feared for his life, but because he was afraid of success. They might repent; and if they did, God would forgive them. He confessed later, when this actually happened: "Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil."

Jonah fled to Joppa, and embarked for Tarshish. He was determined to get away from saving Nineveh. But God was just as determined that this wicked nation should have a chance to repent. A great storm arose that threatened the lives of all on board the vessel, and Jonah was too much of a man to allow others to suffer on his account. The storm convinced him that he could not escape from the

presence of the Lord, and he allowed himself to be cast into the sea, that the other passengers might be saved. That noble act transformed him. He turned to God, and God heard him. The story of the fish does not call for special attention; it is needed for the frame work of the narrative. The point is that Jonah, humbled and repentant, was saved, and immediately sent to discharge the original God-given duty from which he had tried to escape. This time his obedience was prompt, and without complaint.

And now Jonah is in the great city of Nineveh, and the inhabitants are startled by his cry, that the city because of its wickedness is in danger of speedy destruction. From street to street the prophet sounds his piercing message of doom. He has nothing to back his word. There is no outward sign of any catastrophe; no foe is seen, no pestilence threatens, the mighty walls are intact, no storms appear, no flames are seen, no flood approaches. All seems calm and peaceful as on the day before. But the words of that lonely stranger, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," strikes terror to the heart of every soul. Remorse for the violence and cruelty of generations is awakened, and all put on sackcloth, from the least to the greatest. The king rises from his throne, and lays his robe aside to cover himself with sackcloth and sit in ashes. He issues a mandate that everyone shall pray and repent and turn from his evil way; the very animals are to be covered with mourning. "Who can tell," said the king, "if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"

No preaching ever produced such results before or since. Is it any wonder that God saved the city? But now Jonah becomes his old self again. He is disappointed and angry because his preaching has been so successful. He wants Nineveh destroyed, and goes outside of the city to sulk. Here the Lord rebukes him with the question: "Doest thou well to be angry?" Jonah tries to defend his

attitude, but he is only thinking of himself and his official dignity, while God is thinking of how he might be kind and gracious to the people of Nineveh. Jonah waited on a hillside for the outcome. To shelter himself from the scorching rays of the sun, he had erected a booth which thinly screened him. His heart was very bitter. A broad-leaved gourd that grew up in a night aided in protecting him from the sun, but a worm gnawed the stem, and the next day it withered and died. The noon-day sun scorched the prophet, until he was faint and begged for death. Again, God rebuked his inhumanity: "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?" Jonah replied: "I do well to be angry, even unto death."

God is still patient, and in a gentle way remonstrates with his narrow-minded prophet: "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand, and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

What a magnificent lesson this is for all of us! By this sudden and dramatic ending there is left ringing in our ears God's protest against the inhumanity of this erring prophet. He wants us to know that his mercy is extended to all his children, and even to the brute creation. A patriotism that cannot see any good in other nations is mean and contemptible. Jonah is not the only patriot who has had that fault. Many Americans look upon foreigners as beneath their notice. They demand isolation from contact with all other nations, except for purposes of exploitation. This is a wrong attitude. That patriotism is best which is the broadest. No nation can live for itself alone, and succeed. This is the great lesson of Jonah. The time had come for Israel to share the great truths which God had revealed to that favored nation with other nations.

Christianity knows no barriers. Our memory text expresses this thought.

In many respects Jonah was a good man. His prayer in the second chapter is evidence of that. But he was a bigot, and God hates bigotry. This book shows that God loves the world and all people everywhere. It anticipates the Gospel which Jesus taught and which Paul and his fellow-missionaries carried "to every nation under heaven." Love for others is the great outstanding message of Christianity; and when we who profess to be followers of Christ learn that truth and live it, there will be no difficulty in converting the world to the religion of Jesus. But until our love is deep enough and broad enough to include men of every race and color as our brothers, we ourselves are no Christians in the highest sense, and our message falls on deaf ears, and hearts are untouched.

---

### *Open the Windows*

Let there be many windows to your soul,
That all the glory of the universe
May beautify it. Not the narrow pane
Of one poor creed can catch the radiant rays
That shine from countless sources. Tear away
The blinds of superstition; let the light
Pour through fair windows broad as Truth itself,
And high as God.

—Ella Wheeler.

### *Class Problems*

1. What reason have we for saying that Jonah did not write this book? (See 3:3.) Give other reasons.
2. Why did Jonah refuse to warn Nineveh?
3. Tell about his experience on the ship.

4. What finally induced him to fill his mission?
5. Describe Nineveh.
6. What effect did his preaching have? Result?
7. Discuss 4:2-3; and 4:6-11.
8. What is the message of this book to us?

## LESSON 95

# MALACHI, THE MESSENGER OF JEHOVAH

Lesson Text: Malachi 1:2-12; 3:1-18.

Song; Student Reading: Mal. 1:3-6; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Mal. 3:8.

Concert Prayer: We thank thee, our Heavenly Father, for all thy holy prophets and messengers from the beginning of the world until now. May we prepare ourselves to receive their words as they come to us from day to day. Cleanse our minds and hearts from all light-mindedness and hypocrisy, that we may worship thee in spirit and in truth, and be worthy to assist in ushering in a new day of religious fervor. Men's hearts are set upon the things of this world, and they have forgotten thee and the glory of thy kingdom. Endow us with the power of thy Spirit that people may come to us for the bread of life. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Memory Text: Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple.—Mal.* 3:1.

Explain: 1:2 Wherein hast thou loved us? 3 I hate Esau. 4 Thus saith the Lord. 7 Polluted. Bread. Table. 8 Blind * * * lame * * * sick. 3:1 My messenger. To his temple. 3 He shall purify the sons of Levi. 6 I change not. 11 The devourer. 17 My jewels.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *God's Jewels*

The prophecy of Malachi was probably written sometime after the reading of the Law of Ezra, perhaps about 430 B. C. The prophet begins by saying, "I have loved you, saith the Lord." This is a startling message, for just at that time conditions in Jerusalem were hard to bear. Their fields were parched, locusts had eaten the foliage of their trees and vines, their priests and rulers were faithless, and many homes were broken up by divorces. Wealthy heathen women had driven out the Jewish wives, and married their husbands. Knowing all this, we are not surprised that they should say, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" Many of them were about to apostatize. They felt God had forsaken them, that he was not just, and had not kept the promise that he had made to Zechariah, that he would come

to his temple when it was finished, and usher in a glorious day for Israel.

We can understand how these people felt. They had been seventy years in slavery to a cruel people. Then they made great sacrifices to return, and all these years they had been exposed to the scorn, violence and robbery of Samaritans and Ammonites. Their harvests had been swept away by armed bands of marauders, their seed washed out of the ground by floods, or rendered useless by droughts. They had listened to their children crying for bread, and seen their lips blue with hunger. Were such conditions evidences of God's love? Where were the blessings that had been promised their fathers, when they returned from Babylon? Every prospect had been blighted, every benediction frustrated. Yet the divine message was: "I am the Lord, I change not." "I have loved you."

And now the people are to hear the Lord's side. The worship in the new temple is carried on with indifference and half-heartedness. The law required that the animals offered for sacrifice should be perfect. Instead of that, these people were offering lame, sick and blind animals. Moreover, they seemed to sniff at the entire temple ceremony. Their whole religious life was at a low level. For this reason, Malachi warns them that God is very much displeased with their conduct, and will take steps to purify them. A messenger will be sent to sift out the false from the true. The figures used are those of soap that removes dirt, and fire that purifies silver and gold from its dross.

The prophet also speaks of social conditions. They are harboring sorcerers, perjurers, adulterers, and men who are taking advantage of the hireling. It appears that they had sweat shops even in that day. There is financial dishonesty among men who should have been trustees for those who were helpless, and the stranger. But worse than all this, the leaders and priests are actually divorcing their

Jewish wives and leaving them without support, to marry heathen women because of their wealth. This is the thing which Ezra and Nehemiah had condemned in such scathing terms, and which the people had solemnly covenanted to discontinue. "For Judah hath profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god. * * * The Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant." Where can we find a higher word on marriage than this?

Malachi's literary method is different from that of any other prophet. First he makes a charge; then he fancies someone raises an objection, which he proceeds to answer in detail. Notice what he says about tithing: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." Then he goes on to tell them that the whole nation is cursed because the people have robbed God. The covenant reads that they are to give one-tenth of all their increase to the temple. This they have not done, and that is the reason why drouth has parched the land, and their crops have failed. Malachi challenges them to test the Lord by bringing their tithes to his storehouse, and they will see what he will do for them. The locusts shall be rebuked, the vine shall not cast her fruit before the time in the field, and all nations shall call them blessed because of the fertility of their soil.

Men like Malachi are sorely needed in times like our own, when commercialism is rampant, and pleasure is more sought after than God. Such a man renews faith when faith is dead. As we have seen, he had his troubles. People were indifferent to temple worship. Religion was unpopular. Men said that there was no profit in serving God, just as they are doing today. But Malachi had courage; he dared to dream, preach and toil for a new and better day.

Haggai was right; the Lord would come to his temple, as had been predicted. And so today, although men and women seem indifferent to the things of God, a great number at heart are deeply religious. Many church leaders are proclaiming a new day, when righteousness shall prevail and God's Spirit shall reign in the hearts of men. As Malachi said to Judah in days of old, so may it with truth be said today, "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple * * * behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap."

There is need for everyone to search his heart, for the sins that Malachi denounced are the sins of our own generation. Are we guilty of religious indifference? Do we give cheap and defective things to God? Are the poor exploited, and the rich given special privileges? Are homes broken by divorce because of selfishness and sin? Do we rob God and then blame him, and say there is no profit in serving him? These are some of the evils which Malachi charged against the Jews of his day. Well might he ask, as he predicted the sudden coming of the Lord to his temple, "But who may abide the day of his coming?" That question also confronts us. The dross and dirt must be removed from our lives, before we are ready for the great day of the Lord.

Malachi speaks with hope and confidence of a select number who shall make ready for the day of his coming: "and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." And notice the glorious promise that is made to those who feared God. "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

Surely it is worth while to be numbered among those who have loved God and kept the faith. There is something

more in life than transient pleasures and earthly treasures. God holds out to us the promise of a glorious day, but there is no royal road that leads to it. We must pay the price of high spiritual attainment in time, energy and service. Only those who seek God find him; only those who knock have the door opened for them; only those who ask in faith receive a vision of the coming Lord. "Do your part," says God, "and see if I will not do mine." On that promise we may stake our lives.

---

*New Edens*

We men of earth have here the stuff
Of Paradise—we have enough!
We need no other stones to build
The stairs into the Unfulfilled—
No other ivory for the doors—
No other marble for the floors—
No other cedar for the beam
And dome of man's immortal dream.
Here on the paths of every day—
Here on the common human way—
Is all the busy gods would take
To build a Heaven, to mold and make
New Edens. Ours the task sublime
To build eternity in time!

—Edwin Markham.

*Class Problems*

1. When and where did Malachi prophesy?
2. What was his first statement?
3. What reason did the people have for doubting that statement?
4. What were some of the charges which the Lord brought against the people?
5. What did Malachi say about tithing?

6. What is really meant by the Lord suddenly coming to his temple?
7. Has the answer to the above question any application today?
8. Who are to be selected when God makes up his jewels?
9. How may we be numbered among his jewels?
10. Do men still rob God? How?
11. How may we prepare the way of the Lord?

## LESSON 96

# OUR BIBLE, THE WORD OF GOD

Song; Student Reading: Psalm 119:97-101; Prayer by Student; Concert Reading: Psalm 119:103-105.

Concert Prayer: Loving Father, on this last day of our association together, we come before thee in gratitude and prayer. We thank thee for the wonderful contact we have had with all these men and women of God. Their intimate companionship has been to us a constant source of joy and profit. May the influence of their lives be a daily fountain of inspiration to high endeavor. Each of them has come to us with a message of his own, and we pray that we may be able to call them one by one to our assistance in times of need. O Father, we thank thee for this rare privilege that has come into our lives. Give us strength, fortitude and courage to hold aloft the banner of righteousness as did thy ancient servants. Thy revelation to men is not complete. Our own generation needs to know thee better. Grant that we may be the messengers of a new day when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Amen.

*Memory Text: And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.—2 Tim.* 3:15.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

### *The Book of Life*

And so ends our visit with the men and women of God who led and inspired Israel from the days of Abraham to Malachi, the last named prophet of the Old Testament. We lay our book aside and leave the land which God selected to be the home and heritage of his chosen people. It is to be hoped that we will carry with us a rich experience. Few people, comparatively speaking, have had a contact so holy. It is a great thing to be able to say that patriarchs, prophets, judges, seers and kings have been our intimate companions. To live with such characters and breathe the sacred atmosphere of their lofty thoughts and words is a rare experience. To feel the warm glow of their sublime faith, and stand with them as they gave utterance to some of the noblest sentiments that ever fell from mortal lips, is an event in our lives that can never be forgotten.

No doubt, to most of us there is a feeling of regret that our study is ended. But really, we do not need to part with these heroes of the faith. Nothing now can sever the relationship which we hold to them. They may still be our companions, friends, teachers and guides. Every one has made a contribution to our spiritual needs. They all stand ready still to answer when we call.

In the days to come, if men should seek to intimidate us and call in question the truth which we have been sent to declare, we need only summon the courageous Amos to our side, and hear again his fearless answer to the high priest Amaziah, who threatened and forbade him to prophesy in Bethel. "Thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely be taken captive." Who could be afraid with such a champion as his friend?

To every honest seeker after truth will come perplexity and doubt concerning the great problems that involve God's dealings with men. We cannot always answer the questions that arise in our minds. But we need only call Habakkuk to our side. Do you remember what he did when he could not understand why the righteous suffered at the hands of the wicked? He stood in his watch-tower and waited for the Lord to answer his question. We need only follow his example, and God will surely have something to say to us.

When days are dark and troubles come upon us thick and fast, we must not forget to summon that dear prophet of gladness, Zechariah. Immediately he will sing to us his wonderful song of hope, of better days to come. "Put away your mourning and fasting," he said to his discouraged countrymen; "there is no use wringing your hands and giving way to grief. Right-about-face, and lay hold of the duties you are neglecting. If you want a better world, begin by making yourselves better." Certainly, after listening to him and reading his wonderful visions, the sun will shine for us again.

Then there is Hosea, that great prophet of love, bearing the terrible burden of his domestic affliction. How can we ever hate a brother, or a friend, or even an enemy, when we remember the awful tragedy of his erring wife and her husband's forgiveness? What a revelation he gives us of God's love! We can never refuse to forgive anyone again, if we remember Hosea.

And Micah absolutely refuses to leave our memories. He was so intensely in earnest, so bitter against those who made religion a cloak to cover their hypocrisy and wickedness, and so friendly to the poor. Who can ever forget his definition of true religion: "And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" No matter where we go, we can never get away from Micah.

Of course, we are also going to think of Obadiah, that little book that a great many think ought to be taken out of the Bible. Some day you will be glad that it is there. When the forces of evil laugh to scorn those who stand for God and his truth, and from entrenched strongholds in the mountains of Edom, cry out: "Who shall bring us down?" then Obadiah and his brave challenge will come to our support. We hear his thrilling words across the centuries: "Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord." Who can doubt the final triumph of righteousness, with Obadiah by his side?

And even Haggai, plain, common-place Haggai, left with us a valuable lesson. Surely, he should come to our aid every time there is a church to build. He showed us the need of a sanctuary where we might meet with God. Who can pass up an opportunity to assist in the erection of a house of worship, with his words of reproach ringing in our ears: "Is it a time for you to dwell in panelled houses when this house is lying in ruins?" Yes, Haggai also has left a message for us.

And who can ever forget the four great major prophets? Words fail us when we recall these immortal heroes. We merely met them and hurried on, but surely something remains with us as a result of this brief contact. These men would furnish us with lessons for a year or more, and we could never hope to exhaust the truths they uttered. Let each of us resolve some day to know them better. And we must keep in mind all the rest of the men and women we have met. There is not space to even name them, but each one left with us some lesson that we must take with us to ponder and cherish as if it came from God.

O this Bible of ours! This word of God! This book of life! What a wealth of precious truths are hid within its sacred pages! What words can possibly tell the story of its priceless worth! Whose imagination is vivid enough to conceive the comfort it has brought to sorrowing souls and broken hearts! It has been the life and light of the world for five and twenty centuries. Kingdoms have come and gone, empires have flourished and fallen to decay, conquerors, rulers, mighty men of war and peace, have played their little part and passed from the stage of human activities to be seen no more; but the word of God endures forever. Men have ridiculed it, laughed at it, claimed to have proved it false, condemned it to oblivion, and still it remains the greatest force for righteousness in the world. Not one person in ten thousand knows its matchless worth. Men may search it all their days, read it a thousand times, and still find new truth to gladden and refresh their souls. Truly, it is a comforter in our day of sorrow, a companion in our loneliness, a source of strength in our hour of weakness, a witness for God when doubts assail us. The Bible is our greatest heritage from the past. It comes to us laden with a thousand blessings, sanctified by countless millions of human souls who have read and loved it from the days of Ezra until now. Jesus knew and drew much of his

inspiration from its sacred pages; Paul was familiar with the deeds and words of every character we have studied. Any other single thing we have in the world might be dispensed with, but what would the nations do if this sacred book were lost? Nothing could take its place.

Every boy and girl in America ought to know the Bible better than any other book. They should learn to love it as their dearest treasure. But this requires study, reflection, prayer and faith. It is to become a fountain of life, a superficial knowledge of it is not sufficient. Its depths must be sounded, its heights determined, and the extent of it measured. We must see in imagination, at least, the land from which it came and the character of the people that brought it forth, and understand the age in which they lived. Our hearts must be in the study, and God near to inspire our efforts. With such conditions to help us we can make the book our own.

---

*The Book of Books*

*The Bible walks the ways of all the world with familiar feet and enters land after land to find its own everywhere. It comes into the palace to tell the monarch that he is the servant of the Most High, and into the cottage to assure the peasant that he is a son of God. It has a word of peace for the time of peril, a word of comfort for the day of calamity, a word of light for the hour of darkness. The wicked and the proud tremble at its warning, but to the wounded and the penitent it has a mother's voice. Above the cradle and beside the grave its great words come to us uncalled. No man is poor or desolate who has this treasure for his own.*

*—Henry van Dyke.*

*Class Problems*

1. Name the character in this course who has inspired you most, and give reasons.

2. Tell something about each of the minor prophets.
3. Which of these men do you consider the greatest? Why?
4. Give five reasons why we should know the Bible.
5. Name the books of the Bible that have not been mentioned in this course.

Ruth Ecort — Lesson 39. "Esther, the Patriot" Jun
Eric Asay — Chorister. Lesson 7. "Rebekah, the
Frank Asay — "Joseph, the Dreamer" — Lessons 12
Carol Thorne * — " " Slave" — " 13
Amelia Jolley — " " Ruler" — " 14
Merlin Robertson — " " Avenging Brother"
Kendric Workman * — "Elijah, the Courageous Prop
Vernis Asay — Chairman, Chap. 5 2
"David, the Young Champ
Lessons and Prayer. Chap
Annice Kadinsky — Opening — Chap. 26.
Cassie Nichols — "Ruth, the Moabitess" — Lesson
Emma Carlton — Chap. 19. "Moses, the Lawgive
Nella Allphin — Chap. 22. "Balaam the Co
Ruth Allphin — Chap. 23. "Moses, the Emancip
and Teach
Flora Fletcher — Chap. 9. "Esau, the Failure
Donna Grant — Chap. 24
Norma Nichols — Chap. 27.
Esther Johnson — Chap. 7.
Ruth Shelton — Chap. 6.
Alice Watson — Chap. 45.

DATE DUE

SEP 2 2 1998
DEC 0 4 1995
NOV 2 4 1993
DEC 2 9 1998
DEC 1 6 1993
FEB 2 6 1999
MAR 1 8 1999
MAR 1 8 1999
APR 0 8 1999
MAR 2 6 1999
APR 1 8 2002
APR 0 9 2002
JAN 0 5 2004
DEC 0 9 2003
DEC 1 5 2004
JAN 0 4 2005
APR 2 6 2005
APR 0 6 2005
OCT 1 8 2008
OCT 0 2 2008
DEC 0 5 2008
APR 1 3 2009
APR 0 2 2009
JAN 0 4 2010
DEC 0 9 2009

Brigham Young University

FEB 0 7 1998

3 1197 00129 1258